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The Young Express Agent



"I TAKE THE EXPRESS NOW. THE OTHER BOY QUIT,"
SAID HARRY, COMING FORWARD."

The Young Express Agent

BY

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*Author of "The Boy Duck Hunters," "The Boy
Fishermen," etc.*

Illustrated by

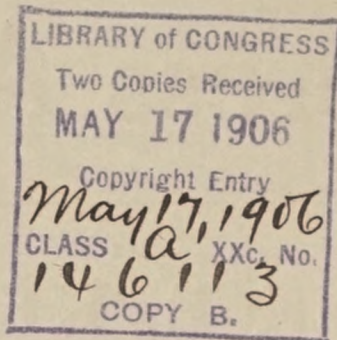
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THE YOUNG EXPRESS AGENT

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Preface



It may interest the young reader to know that most of the incidents related in this book actually occurred. And that the hardy, rollicking, jolly band of express and railway employees were real flesh and blood. Just a few changes and alterations in their make-up.

THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BAKER FAMILY

“LOOK out, Harry.”

The boy addressed turned just in time to catch a snowball in the ribs that had been intended for his back.

The damp sphere crumbled to pieces at the blow, leaving a round spot of snowy whiteness on his side.

A merry roar of cheers and laughter followed the well-aimed shot, and the next instant Harry Baker and his companion had accepted the challenge and were sending and receiving snowballs by the score. The air was filled with the soft, white missiles.

“Give it to them, Tent,” and Harry made a quick side jump, as a mimic cannon-ball grazed his shoulder. A moment later and one struck

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Tent Shafer on the side of the head, followed by much laughter and clapping of hands. He whirled around to see another band of smaller boys on the opposite side of the street.

“Here. ‘Two on one, is nigger’s fun,’” he called out, indignantly, sending a snowball into the ranks of the new charging party. The original enemy manfully turned their batteries toward the band of small marauding bandits, and with their assistance the small rascals were soon scattered.

Then the original battle began again. Two more schoolmates happening along took sides with Harry and Tent, and snowballs flew thick as bees in swarming time. Gradually the distance between the opposing hosts lessened as the battle grew fiercer. A ball reaching its mark was a signal for triumphant laughter from the opposing army.

More boys joined in the sport on either side, and it became a battle royal. Staid middle-aged business men paused to watch the snow fight, the grave steady eyes lighting up with the fires of youth as the balls flew thicker and faster. Closer crept the advancing squadrons. Then, suddenly, as if by mutual consent, there was a

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wild rush, and a rolling, tumbling, struggling mass of boys were down in the snow, washing faces, poking snow down the back of reluctant necks, and filling pockets until, tiring of the sport, every one sprang to his feet and began to shake the snow from his clothes, a group of white-robed phantoms.

"Our side beat," called a chubby boy, turning a headspring in the soft snow.

"You beat nothing," retorted Tent Shafer, tossing a bit of snow toward the boaster.

"That's more fun than I've had in a month," remarked a tall boy from the opposing side, digging a bit of rapidly melting snow from under his coat collar.

"Yes. It's more fun than doing cube root," said another, turning his pockets wrong side out, in the search for snow.

"You're always complaining about your arithmetic. Why don't you work and get your examples?" said Jim Travers, eyeing him with a superior air.

"I do work," was the indignant retort.

"Only at odd times, my son. You draw too many smoke-houses, and six-legged cats, and iron-jawed prize-fighters on your slate, when

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you ought to be doing your examples. Or else you are throwing sheep's eyes or paper wads at your girl across the room," and Jim caught the complaining youth by the shoulders and bent him backward over his knee, while the others laughed.

"Quit, you big monkey. I do study just as much as the rest of you, but I don't understand it," and he twisted away from his tormentor.

"Get Harry Baker to show you. He's high man on arithmetic," suggested another, aiming a snowball at a man half a block away.

"Better study it out for himself. Then he'll know it for keeps," said Harry, as a bevy of girls came along.

"Don't you *dare* to throw snowballs at us," cried one of the latter, as she caught a gleam of mischief in the boys' eyes.

"Of course not, Minnie. I just want to see if I can hit that fence post to the right of you," and a snowball whizzed past her head.

"Jim Travers, you just quit that, or I'll tell the teacher."

Whizz, bang. More snowballs, followed by a chorus of girlish shrieks.

"Tent Shafer, I'll tell the — Ow," and a soft

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missile struck the speaker on the back, cutting short the threat.

"There's Harry Baker throw—Ouch. Oh, I think boys are horrid."

"Run, girls," called one of the keener-witted ones. There was a clutching of dresses, a hasty scampering of feet, and the "horrid boys" were alone.

Numberless happy, chattering, snowballing groups of boys and girls were scattered through the little town on their way home. For school was just out, and the warm, pleasant March afternoon caused them to linger. Add to that six inches of damp, freshly fallen snow, and one has an attraction that compels respect.

"Come on, boys. Let's go home. I must get my wood in," called Harry Baker, as the girls went out of range.

"Wait till I paste that old farmer," said Jim Travers, indicating a man in a sleigh half a block off.

"Pshaw! You can't come within a block of him."

"I'll show you." There was a violent contortion, a wild swinging of arms, and Jim heaved the snowball far aloft in a high curve.

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He was an excellent thrower, and the boys were not astonished at the result. For the snow-ball swooped down and landed fairly on the farmer's heavy fur cap. A start of wild surprise. Then he looked around and saw the group of boys. He shook his whip threateningly, and then thinking discretion was the better part of valor, whirled around, whipped up his team, and quickly got out of range, followed by an ecstasy of laughter.

"That's the last shot. Come on," and the group chatted along, firing a stray shot at a wandering cat or dog that chanced to be on the street or skulking through an alley.

Presently two boys, about their own ages, passed them. Both were smoking cigarettes, hats perched jauntily on one side of the head, eyes roving boldly around, teeth stained and discolored with tobacco, and a generally hard, cunning look. In fact they bore the typical appearance of the bold, forward youth, who is prematurely aged in the smaller vices of men.

"Hello, Jasper," called Jim Travers, "have you quit school entirely?"

"Sure thing. My time's too valuable to waste in school," and the young fellow addressed

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perched his hat a little farther on one side, and tried to look wise.

"What are you doing now?" asked young Travers.

"Oh, working for 'Street & Walker,' but I'm thinking of leaving them and going with 'Doolittle & Setmore,' " and Jasper Hardy, the truant, who had a great contempt for boys that went to school regularly and tried to keep up with their classes, passed on, with an arrogant, superior air.

"I don't believe he has been to school a week in the last two years," remarked Tent Shafer, glancing back at the pair.

"He never studied when he did go," said Jim Travers, "just dragged along at the end of the class."

"He won't learn much good from Bill Ranting," observed Harry. "That boy has been a little tough ever since he could walk. I remember hearing him swear when he wasn't more than five."

"He doesn't want to learn anything good. He wants folks to think he is tough, and a bad man," replied Tent. "I don't see what his folks

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can be thinking of. He'll land in the calaboose, first thing he knows."

But Jasper Hardy and his companion were caring little what their schoolmates thought of them. They were entirely satisfied with themselves, and loafed along, blowing clouds of smoke from their lips, with a conscious air of superiority.

"These last cigarettes are jim dandies, Bill. Where did you get them?" said Jasper, lighting a fresh "coffin nail."

"Up at 'hole-in-the-wall.' Pete just got them in, last week."

"Will they let you have beer, there?" asked Jasper, anxiously.

"Sure. Have anything I want," and Master Ranting threw his chest out a couple of inches, and exhaled a cloud of smoke from his lungs.

"I tried to get a glass of beer there about a month ago, and Pete wouldn't let me have it," said Jasper, with an injured look.

"That's because he wasn't sure of you. If you travel with me awhile you can get anything you want there," replied young Ranting, with a patronizing air.

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"Oh, I'll get there, after awhile," responded Jasper, hopefully.

As they passed a couple of middle-aged well-dressed men, one of the latter remarked:

"Isn't that a nice spectacle? If they were my boys I'd give them a good spanking."

"Do them good, probably," was the rejoinder; "they neither work nor go to school, just loaf around the streets, and smoke and swear."

"That's the kind of material that fills our penitentiaries; too bad," remarked the first speaker.

"Well, Bill. So long. See you this eve, at the corner," and Jasper Hardy turned in at his own gate.

"Jasper, you come and get a pail of water," came a voice from the kitchen.

"Aw, get it yourself. I ain't got time," and Jasper picked up a well-thumbed ten-cent novel, entitled "Bloody Bob, the Boy Burglar," and was soon buried in its startling pages.

Half an hour later came the request:

"Jasper, come and bring in some wood. I declare, you're the laziest boy I ever saw. Your father's got to get after you, young man. You won't work, go to school, or anything else, ex-

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cept smoke them horrid, stinking little cigarettes, and loaf around the streets."

"What's the matter now?" asked a man's voice.

"Oh, I can't get this boy to do a thing. He won't bring in water, wood, or do anything," was the querulous reply.

"Jasper, you come and bring in the wood," said his father, sternly.

The former threw down his novel with a snarl.

"A fellow can't take any comfort in this house without somebody yelling at him to do something," and he slammed out to the wood-shed, banging the door after him.

"You ought to get him a job somewhere, if he won't go to school," said Mrs. Hardy, who had the weary, hopeless air of a woman who discovers that she has not drawn a prize in the marriage lottery.

"I can't get him a job," was the surly response. "Let him find a job. He had one, last year, at Manfred's, but they claim he stole something, and Manfred fired him. He can't expect me to go around hunting jobs for him, if he can't hold them."

"Well, you ought to do something with him.

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He's begun to get in with that rowdy gang, lately," and Mrs. Hardy went into the kitchen to prepare supper.

"Good night, boys. See you in the morning," called Harry Baker, cheerily, as he left his mates, and went whistling up the walk to his modest little home.

"Got the wood in, Phil?" this to his brother about ten.

"No, I broke my sled. Won't you help me fix it, Harry?" asked Phil, looking up, hopefully.

"Of course. And then we'll haul the wood in with it. Is that a bargain?"

"Yes, sir. I'll help you, if you'll fix my sled," and Phil's eyes sparkled with joy. "One of the runners is spreaded out," he added.

"'Spreaded out,' eh? Well, we'll spread it in again," said Harry, with cheery good nature. "Let's see what the matter is. Is that all? I'll fix that in two jerks of a lamb's tail. Bring it to the wood-house."

In fifteen minutes Phil's sled was repaired, and the wood and kindling carried in the kitchen.

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"What we going to have for supper, mother?" and Harry put his arm around a matronly, pleasant-faced woman, who was stirring something on the stove.

"Guess!" and she looked up at her tall son, with a world of pride and affection.

"Give it up. Something good?"

"Pigs' feet and sauerkraut," laughed Mrs. Baker.

"For the land sakes! Are the girls and Jimmy home?"

"Yes. They are in the front room."

"Girls, do you know what we're going to have for supper?" cried Harry, bursting into the room, where Mary, Alice, and Jimmy were playing with dolls.

"No. What is it?" and three eager faces looked up from the floor.

"You couldn't guess in a week."

"Liver and onions," hazarded Mary.

"Spare legs and brown potatoes," cried Alice. (Spare ribs was the idea.)

"Roast pork and apple sauce," said Jimmy, hoping he was right.

"All wrong. Pigs' feet and sauerkraut," said Harry, with a laugh.

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"O-o-o-h, good!" cried Mary, clapping her hands.

"Do we like them?" queried Alice, dubiously.

"Of course. We like anything that mother cooks. What's the matter with Maria Louise?" and Harry pointed to a doll, with its head somewhat awry, that she was clutching.

"The head's comed loose. Won't you fix it, Harry?" and Alice held up her baby.

"Yes. Get me the hammer and a couple of tenpenny nails," and he gravely reached for her treasure.

"No, no. You will break it. It must be glued," and she backed away from her big brother, with a look of alarm.

"Oh, you big tease. You wouldn't use nails, and you know it," laughed Mary, catching him around the waist.

"All right. Glue goes, then," and two minutes later Harry was on the floor, resetting and gluing the head of "Maria Louise," while a circle of admiring heads watched his every motion.

"There you are. Lay her on the stove to dry, and she's good as new," he announced.

"I won't. She'll burn up," and Alice snatched

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her mended treasure and flew to the doll corner, while the older ones laughed.

"Huh! You believe everything he says, but I don't," remarked Jimmy, with a superior air.

"You don't, eh? I'll show you," and Harry caught up the small boaster and rubbed his ribs until a laughing, screaming romp was in progress.

"There. That will teach you to take a joke," and Harry flung himself into a chair, panting and breathless.

"Hold on. 'King's excuse,'" he cried, as Jimmy started for him again. And in obedience to those magic words, the children became quiet, and the jolly uproar ceased.

"Aren't you children making a good deal of noise in here?" and Mrs. Baker looked in from the kitchen.

"Just a little spasm Jim had. Everything is quiet now," answered Harry, demurely.

"I'll keep them quiet," announced Phil, striding into the room, and flinging his cap in a corner.

"Phil Baker," warned his mother, shaking her finger.

"Oh, I forgot," and Phil, somewhat sheep-

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ishly, picked up his cap and hung it where it belonged.

“Harry, read ‘Grimm’s Fairy Tales’ to us,” cried Mary, eagerly.

“All right. Bring Mr. Grimm to me. Maybe I can forget how hungry I am,” and presently, with four rapt, eager listeners, he was reading the beautiful fairy-tales for the hundredth time, perhaps.

“Come, Mary, and set the table.”

“Ah! that sounds good,” and Harry’s eye lighted up, as he closed the book.

“You needn’t help, Alice. You’ll break something,” called Mary, as she deftly began to arrange the table.

“No. You rock Maria Louise to sleep,” said Harry, gravely. And Alice, taking him literally, began to softly croon, “Bye Baby, Bye O,” from her low rocking-chair.

“Now, children, turn your elbows in, and your noses up, and look solemn,” remarked Harry, as he took the head of the table.

“Do we eat the toes?” asked Jimmy, eyeing the carving with great interest.

“You do if you want to,” replied Harry, absently, as he skilfully severed the joints.

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"Why, we can't eat the toes. They're too hard," said Alice, who was somewhat lacking in humor.

"Then you wouldn't want to, would you? Have some turnip, Phil?"

"Yes. Everything. I'm hungry," was the prompt reply.

"Queer thing to see you hungry. There. Guess I'm clear around the circle. Fall to, now, and don't hurt yourselves," and several sharp sets of teeth were soon sampling pigs' feet and sauerkraut, with a will.

"Jasper Hardy and that Ranting boy passed us when we were coming from school, and both of them were smoking cigarettes. Acted as if they thought it smart," said Mary, scornfully.

"Yes. They passed us, too," Harry replied. "Jasper can't move, lately, without Bill Ranting. He doesn't pretend to go to school any more."

"I don't know what his folks can be thinking of; he is the only boy, too. I used to go to school with Ollie Ranting, and she was a good girl, but I guess she took her pigs to a poor market when she got Seth Ranting," said Mrs. Baker, in a sympathizing tone.

"Maybe she had pigs' feet," suggested Alice,

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with grave quaintness, that caused everybody to smile.

"Pigs' feet seem to have a pretty good market here," observed Harry, looking at the empty platter.

"Seth Ranting has drunk more or less, ever since I knew him," Mrs. Baker went on. "I know people shook their heads when Ollie married him, and I guess his boy is coming on about the same way. I'm glad you don't take to that kind of a life. Well, what is it, Jimmy?"

"May Alice and me have some more jam?"

"You mean 'Alice and I,'" corrected Harry.

"No, I don't mean you, either. I mean me," asserted Jimmy.

"All right. I forgot that you hadn't started in on grammar yet," smiled Harry.

"You mustn't have but a little more, because it's rich," said Mrs. Baker, as she dished out the savory sauce.

"You little chaps mustn't make yourselves sick, or you will have to swallow a lot of nasty medicine, and that wouldn't be so nice," warned Harry, as he pushed back from the table.

"Huh! I could eat a whole barrel of it," boasted Jimmy, with greedy eyes.

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“Probably. But you wouldn’t want any more right away,” remarked Harry, dryly.

“Mary, can you and Alice wash the dishes?” asked Mrs. Baker.

“Yes, ma’am,” responded Mary, promptly; “that is, if Alice ever gets through eating.”

“Harry, will you help me with my arithmetic?” queried Phil.

“Of course. That’s what I’m for,” was the cheery reply. And soon after the table was cleared, Harry was busily engaged in untangling square root knots for Phil’s benefit.

CHAPTER II.

HARRY BAKER QUILTS SCHOOL

"HARRY, I would like to have a talk with you, before you go to bed." Mrs. Baker's usually pleasant, jolly face wore a troubled, care-worn look as she spoke, and the lines on her brow deepened.

The younger children had yawned away to their little bedrooms some time before, and Harry was buried in his old favorite, "Ivanhoe."

"Certainly, mother," and the boy closed his book, and looked across the little table at his mother, who was patiently darning a ragged-looking hole in the knee of one of Jimmy's stockings.

"I should have talked with you before, but I have been dreading it. I suppose you know we are very poor."

"Yes. The boys don't forget to tell me that whenever any of them get mad at me about

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something," and Harry's eyes wrinkled in a smile.

Mrs. Baker blushed painfully. "Well, we are poorer than you think. All we have to live on is our pension. And you know the year before your father died he had to borrow three hundred dollars. He couldn't get it without placing a mortgage on the house. The interest on that is eighteen dollars a year, which we must pay without fail. Then the children are growing every day, and their clothes cost more, and they eat more, and we have to spend more for school-books. So, take it all around, I don't see how we are going to make both ends meet much longer, on our present income," and Mrs. Baker sighed wearily.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" asked the boy, reproachfully.

"Oh, I didn't want to worry you before your time. Goodness knows, you will get enough of it."

"Well, there is only one thing to do. I must quit school and go to work," said Harry, energetically.

"I don't like to have you drop school, but I don't know what we will do unless some of us

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earns something, pretty soon. I've puzzled my brains trying to figure out some way that I could make some money, but I haven't been able to. It's no disgrace to be poor, but it's very inconvenient," and Mrs. Baker sighed again.

"Never mind, mother. When I'm a man, I'll see that you wear silks and diamonds," said Harry, kissing her affectionately.

"Oh, no. I don't ask that," laughed his mother, "just plain clothes and enough to eat."

"I'll begin to look for a job right away, and when I find one I'll quit school and take it," Harry declared, in a determined way.

"Oh, I think you had better finish the term," objected his mother.

"That wouldn't benefit me much more, so I don't care whether I do or not. I would like to finish some work I have on hand, particularly in algebra, but that will only take until about the first of May. Then I will get to work. Is that all right?"

"Yes. And I thank the Father every day that I have such a boy," and Mrs. Baker kissed him good night with tears in her eyes.

Before he went to sleep that night Harry pondered deeply upon what his mother had told

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him. He told himself that he must go to work and help to lighten her burden of worry. But what to do, that was the question. There were few opportunities in the little sleepy town of Bluffton, where he lived. He might get a junior clerkship in one of the stores at a bare pittance. Then if he was honest and faithful and worked unusually hard in the long years to come, his salary might be raised gradually until he received as much as eight or ten dollars a week. Not a very enticing prospect.

Harry was but a sample of tens of thousands of American boys. Born of respectable and honest, but poor parents, after a common school education, they are turned adrift, free-lances before the world, to cut and carve, according to their abilities, opportunities, ambitions, or whatever it may be called, with no capital but health and brains.

Not an inviting prospect at first glance. But it is history that *the giants of the race have come from that class of boys*, and will continue to come from them. The hardy atmosphere is conducive to their growth. However, don't think that they will all be giants. It depends entirely upon the boy and his ambition. But any

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one of them may become a giant in some particular walk of life, if he tries. Remember that, boys.

Harry's father, Tom Baker, was one that did not become a giant. At least, in the eyes of the world.

He had barely become of age when the Civil War broke out. The President issued a call for volunteers, and the country was at fever heat. A meeting was called at the little schoolhouse, and young and old flocked there. The air was full of war talk. The books were made ready, and then came the call for volunteers. There was a momentary hush, but not a man stirred. Then Tom Baker walked down the aisle, and writing his name upon the book of fate, said fearlessly:

“I'll fight for the old flag.”

A cheer went up, and men crowded forward by scores to put down their names. The company was quickly made up, and marched away to the scene of conflict. The world knows the rest. Many of that gallant little band never saw friends or home again, and their bones bleach to-day upon southern battle-fields.

But Tom Baker went through it all, and at

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the close of the struggle was honorably mustered out, and returned home to take up the duties of a private citizen and support his family. However, he did not get ahead much. He was but a sample of thousands of those soldier boys. As a business man, he was a failure. As a soldier, he had been the bravest of the brave; dashing, daring, and brilliant. He was the hero of a hundred battles and skirmishes, and he loved to tell about it. In fact he enjoyed the recital of those terrible events much better than he did the prosy details of business. He had been through the "bloody angle" at Spottsylvania, and he would neglect business any time to live over again the carnage of that awful day, whenever he could get a sympathetic listener.

But now that the country was saved the people had no further use for him as a soldier, and as he failed to accumulate property, he was voted thriftless and lazy.

Perhaps the charge was true. But the country should remember that those civilian soldier boys were taken when just in the first flush of manhood, with characters forming and loins girding for the peaceful battles of business, and without

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a moment's warning hurled into the red jaws of the mightiest, bloodiest war the world has ever seen. Broiled beneath a southern sun; worn by long exhausting marches; camping in fever-stricken swamps; braving the pitiless hail of bullets; and then when the end came after four long, weary years, and the country needed them no longer as soldiers, they were flung back to the arts of peace, and expected to take up the routine of life-work with the same zest they had felt when they dropped it.

Many of them did. Others did not. Tom Baker was of the latter class. The village people said he was a lazy good-for-nothing. He dabbled a little in real estate, and the government gave him a small pension. Of course he was always hard pressed for money, and one day he gave a mortgage of three hundred dollars on the little home. That was all the legacy he left a wife and five children, barring her pension.

The couple of ounces of Confederate lead that he carried in his person finally wore him out, and he died. On every Decoration Day the people strewed flowers over his grave, but that did not help his family to keep the pot boiling.

Harry went to school with a thoughtful air

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next day. Not that he felt the least bit depressed. While he liked to go to school, he was eager to get to earning money, now that he knew their circumstances. The idea of life was beginning to unfold to him, and he wondered what kind of work he would like to do. He knew there was small choice in the little town, but felt confident that he could find something to do, so he felt hopeful and content.

About a week later, when he was going to school one morning, Jim Travers overtook him, and said:

"Did you hear about Jasper Hardy last night?"

"No. What is it?" and he looked up inquiringly.

"They carried him home, dead drunk."

"Drunk!" cried Harry in astonishment. "Where could he get liquor?"

"At Pete Cleary's, I suppose. He has been loafing with Bill Ranting lately, and Bill spends about half of his time there, so I suppose that's where he got it."

Harry shook his head. "Too bad. He'll probably go to the bad fast enough now."

"I don't know what ails the fellow. He seems

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to yearn for that kind of a life," said Jim in disgust.

"It looks that way. He was always hunting up the toughest boys at school," responded Harry, thoughtfully.

"He hasn't had a very good example set him. I've seen his father full half a dozen times," said Jim.

"So have I. And you can always smell liquor on his breath."

"I'll bet you Jasper will be proud of this scrape. You see if he isn't," nodded Jim.

"I don't doubt it. He's just about silly enough."

Jim was right. When Jasper Hardy came down-town next day, his swagger was a little more pronounced, and he seemed to have grown at least two inches in his own estimation. Of course in a small town like that everybody had heard of his escapade.

Men glanced at him in sorrow and disgust. Jasper thought it was awe and respect. Of course he hunted up his new chum, Bill Ranting, and told him all about what a time he had getting sober; and how the old woman cried and took on, and the old man swore; and what a

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head he had on him next morning; how it felt big as a bushel basket; and what bully fun it was, etc. Ah, if he could only have looked ahead!

The first of May arrived, and true to his promise, Harry carried his books home and said good-by to school life. Henceforth he was to be one of the world's workers, receiving and giving hard knocks with the rest of them.

CHAPTER III.

LEARNING THE EXPRESS BUSINESS

"HAVE you any work for me to do, Mr. Manfred?"

James Manfred, proprietor of the largest general store, looked up from his desk.

"I'm afraid not, just now, Harry. But I thought you were going to school?" and the merchant smiled over his glasses at his questioner, for he liked the frank, manly young fellow.

"I quit school this morning. I must go to work and earn some money to help mother," Harry replied with honest frankness.

"That's the way I like to hear a boy talk. Sorry I haven't something for you to do, but every place is filled, and besides, trade is very quiet now," and Mr. Manfred looked thoughtfully around the store.

"Then I must try somewhere else," and a dis-

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appointed look came over the boy's face as he started to go.

"Hope you'll find something. If I have a vacancy, I'll let you know," called the merchant with genuine sympathy.

"All right, sir. Thank you," and Harry passed out.

He visited every store in the little town that forenoon, only to have his inquiry received with a shake of the head. No more help was wanted at present by any of them.

Tired and somewhat discouraged, he returned home at noon.

His face told plainer than words of his ill-success.

"Nothing yet, eh?" smiled his mother, kindly, who was getting the noonday meal ready for the children when they should return from school.

Harry shook his head. "No, but I have a promise when there is a vacancy."

"Oh, well, you'll find something after awhile. And by the way, I want you to take this package down to the express office after dinner. It's that skirt of Alice's I'm sending to Cousin Letty. She said she would pay the charges."

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"All right, mother. Hello! Here come the kidlets." And as he spoke there was a scampering of feet, a shout, a banging of doors, and Mary, Alice, Phil, and Jimmy were in the room, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, and brimming with health and spirits.

"Dinner ready, mother?" "Oh, but I'm hungry." "Harry, sharpen my pencil." "Mother, I lost a button off my waist," and so on.

"Have patience, children, dinner will be ready in a minute, and then I'll attend to you," and Mrs. Baker flitted here and there, while the chattering, laughing, romping band waited with what patience they could for the noonday meal.

"Dinner is ready, children," and two minutes later, sharp, youthful appetites were making great inroads upon the food. And when their hunger was satisfied, away to school for a play spell before the bell rang.

An hour later, Harry stood in the little express office.

"Well, Harry, what can I do for you to-day?" and the express agent, John Harbin, looked up from his desk.

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“Mother wants to send this package. They will pay the charges at the other end.”

“All right, my boy.” And Mr. Harbin took the small package, noted its lightness, and remarking, “That will go for a quarter, all right,” drew a way-bill from a drawer in his desk.

Harry had but few occasions to visit the express office, and he always felt a sort of awe when there. Somehow the name “express” was associated with money, jewelry, and other valuables, and he could not rid himself of the idea of being in the presence of some occult or hidden power.

However, there was nothing very awe-inspiring in the appearance of that office. Simply a few packages and boxes of “on hand” stuff waiting for claimants — expressmen call it “old horse” — a pair of scales, balls of twine, wrapping-paper, etc.

It was but one of the thousands of offices in the various small towns and villages over the country. The great express companies must have an office in every town visited by a railroad, no matter how small or insignificant the place. Of course, in the little towns the business was

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small and the pay according. Some firm, or man in business, was found who would provide office room and take care of the business on a commission. So if little express business was done, the company would be out but little.

In the present instance, the agent, John Harbin, had a small insurance and real estate business, and took the express agency to eke out his small income. He must have an office anyhow, so what little he made out of the express business was clear gain.

"You don't know where I could find a good reliable boy, Harry?"

The question almost took his breath away. His eyes sparkled as he said:

"I am looking for work, but I don't know whether you would call me 'reliable' or not," and he laughed.

Mr. Harbin opened his eyes. "Why, I thought you went to school."

"I have been going, but I quit this morning to go to work at something, if I can find anything to do. Where is Job Dorsey?"

"He quit, and went out in the country to work on a farm, this morning. Leaves me rather short-handed. I want a boy, but I wasn't look-

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ing for one as big as you are. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"I suppose it would hardly pay you to bother with this. The trouble is, you see, the office doesn't earn enough to pay much of anything. There isn't business here to do it."

"How much did you pay Job?"

"Two dollars a week, and then he made more out of it than I did."

"What is there to do?"

"Oh, take the packages to the train and deliver them to the messenger, bring back anything he has for us, deliver the goods and collect the charges. I have attended to the office work, as Job wasn't very bright, as you know, and he doesn't take to such things," and Mr. Harbin smiled.

"Well, I want something to do, and if you want me to, I'll try it," said Harry, after a moment's thought.

"Certainly. Glad to get you. Only sorry that I can't pay you more," said Mr. Harbin, heartily.

"When do you want me to begin?"

"To-day; right now."

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"All right. I'll go home and tell mother, and come right back," and Harry hurried out.

"Mother, I've found a job," he cried, breathlessly, as he rushed into the house.

"Is that so? What is it?" and Mrs. Baker looked up from her sewing, with a smile.

"I'm going to help Mr. Harbin in the express office; take Job Dorsey's place; he has gone out in the country to work on a farm."

"What does he pay you?"

"Two dollars a week. That isn't much, but it'll help some," said Harry, cheerfully.

"Yes, it is better to work for low wages than remain idle. You have heard the old saying, 'Satan finds work for idle hands to do.' Perhaps you can find something better after awhile."

"I'll keep my eyes open for that. Now I must go back and find out what there is to do," and, kissing his mother, he hurried away joyfully.

"Well, you are back promptly," and Mr. Harbin looked up with a pleased smile as Harry re-entered the office.

"Yes, sir, I wish to find out what my duties are," was the reply, with an expectant air.

"Well, there are only two trains a day that carry express. One comes through in the night,

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and one in the afternoon. On the night train, the messenger puts any express he may have for us in the baggage-room, and you go down in the morning and check it over, and bring it to the office. Anything for the merchants you deliver at once, and collect afterwards. The afternoon train you meet and take off any express the messenger gives you. We use my old horse and wagon to deliver with."

"Have you any objections to my learning the office work?" asked Harry, respectfully.

"No sir-e-e. Glad to have you learn it, and do it, if you want to. Job didn't know anything about books, and didn't want to, so I got in the habit of doing it myself. I can show you in a few minutes." He reached under the short counter and took out a book.

"This is the 'in-trip book.' Everything that comes in we copy on this book." He brought out another book about the same size. "This is the 'out-trip book.' Everything that we send out we copy on this book." He picked up another thin book. "This is our abstract book. In it we copy all the way-bills we send out from this office. And finally, this is the statement book. Once a month we make a statement of

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all the business, both 'in' and 'out,' done at this office, deduct our commission, and send the company the balance."

"What is this big envelope for?" asked Harry.

"That is a C. O. D. envelope. It means 'Collect on delivery.' When a merchant or anybody sends goods to anybody by express that they want the cash for when they are delivered, they put the bill for the goods in this envelope, and send it along with the regular way-bills. Then the agent collects for the goods as well as the express charges, and sends it back."

"Here's another kind. What is this?" and Harry picked up another large manila envelope.

"That is a 'P. O. R.' It means 'Pay on return.' When anybody wants the express company to collect an account for them in some distant town, he gives the bill to the agent, and he puts it in this envelope, without sealing. It is then given to the messenger with a regular way-bill, the same as any package, and sent to its destination. The agent there collects the account if he can, puts the money in the same envelope, seals it, and sends it back."

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"I see. I'll soon get on to these things," said Harry, confidently.

"Of course you will. Any bright boy can pick it up in a week. There are other details that will come up gradually, but it's nothing to learn. The one thing you must remember in this business is to have your wits about you constantly, and make no mistakes. An error or two fastens on to an office very quickly, and it gets known over the road as a place where they are liable to make mistakes. Pretty soon, the route agent shows up, and wants to know the cause of it."

"Who is the route agent?" Harry asked.

"He is our boss. The man who has charge of all the offices in a certain territory. He hires and discharges the agents; oversees and checks up the offices; furnishes the supplies, etc. He reports to the superintendent, and keeps him in touch with everything. In fact, he is the man you want to stand well with," and Mr. Harbin smiled.

"All right, sir, I'll try and make as few mistakes as possible," and Harry began at once to pore over the books, locate the supplies, and ask their uses.

His interest and enthusiasm pleased Mr. Har-

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bin greatly, and he took pains to explain everything thoroughly.

Harry was on the threshold of a new world that seemed to be full of mystery and interest to his inexperienced eyes.

Little he dreamed that he was entering upon his life-work, or of the changes he would soon see in the quiet little village, and the thrilling events he would take part in.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAILROAD BOOM

HARRY felt like a business man, when he drove the old horse and wagon down to meet the train that afternoon. He was a little bit nervous, to tell the truth, like a cat in a strange garret. However, he consoled himself with the thought that he would soon know the ropes.

The short passenger train dashed into the depot and stopped, and Harry walked up to the car marked "express."

The side door opened, and a young man in a blue denim working-suit appeared, and looked around inquiringly.

"Where's that freckle-faced, spider-legged kid that takes this express?" he called out to Harry.

"I take the express now. The other boy quit," said Harry, coming forward.

"You? A long-legged, lantern-jawed critter

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like you, take the express? Not much. You're trying to hold up the company," and the messenger glared at him solemnly.

"That's right. I take it now," replied Harry, with a laugh of embarrassment, for he was not used to the ways of messengers yet.

"Where is Harbin? He didn't say anything about a change," and the messenger frowned. "Here he comes now," as Mr. Harbin came hurrying forward. "How is it? Is this boy all right?"

"Yes, sir, he takes charge of the express after this, and he's all right," and the agent slapped Harry familiarly on the shoulder. "I meant to have been here sooner. This is Harry Baker, the new boy; and Harry, this is Mr. Haverly," and Mr. Harbin bustled about and helped with the work.

"That kid will break in two some windy day, he's so long and slim. Better have him bandaged," and with this cheerful remark, the messenger shut the door.

"He is a great joker, but you'll like him after you get used to him," said Mr. Harbin as they drove to the office.

There Harry was shown the process of check-

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ing, stamping, and copying, so his express life had fairly begun. He entered into the work with spirit and enthusiasm, and in a fortnight had everything at his fingers' ends that Mr. Harbin could tell him. He could make statements, abstracts, seal money packages, write way-bills, in fact attend to all of the many details of express work, so that before a month had passed Mr. Harbin felt safe in entrusting the whole business to him.

About a month after he entered the office, a great change took place in railroad matters there. A great trunk line gained control of the small road that passed through Bluffton, and it was made part of a great system. The line was extended far to the west to connect with other lines, regraded and double-tracked. Then came rumors of a division. Doubtless most of our young readers know what a railroad "division" is. It is the point where the crews and locomotives end their "runs," or day's work. You know that the train-crews, and even the big puffing locomotives, must rest after working a certain number of hours, and the places where they rest are called "divisions." There fresh engines and crews are waiting to relieve them

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and whirl the trains onward across the country to another division point, where other fresh men and engines are ready to take *their* posts. These division points are generally from ninety to 150 miles apart. Of course, you will see at once that a division point means something to a small town. There must be a "roundhouse" for the locomotives, machine-shops, eating-houses, hotels, boarding-houses, etc. The railroad company must have large yards containing many tracks to hold the great number of freight-cars necessary in railroading. All these things require many people to manage and run properly, so the advent of a division is a boom for a small town, bringing more population and a rise in value of the property, and they are all anxious to get it. In the present instance other near-by towns were reaching for the plum, with delegations, offers of money, land, etc., and finally sleepy little Bluffton partially awoke from its nap and made an effort to get it. There was much talking, wire-pulling, and heartburnings for a time, but, owing to its favorable location, the plum was finally secured.

Then the little town awoke to life. The frogs that for years had croaked so peacefully in the

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suburbs, hurriedly packed their grips and left for quieter spots, while the mud-turtles silently and sadly vanished.

And well they might, for all was bustle and life. Hotels, depots, and buildings were going up on every hand. The railroad company bought a large tract of land, and put a large railroad yard there, with scores of tracks. Then all was noise and hurry. Day and night the clanging and puffing of switch-engines smote the quiet air; the long, slow freight-trains wound in and out, and the lightning dash of the limited-mail disturbed the country peace.

All of this had its effect upon Mr. Harbin and Harry.

Business boomed. Real estate changed hands rapidly, and the town filled up with strangers, who had come to work on the railroad or take part in the sudden prosperity.

Mr. Harbin suddenly found his hands full of business, almost more than he could attend to. Conveying real estate, making deeds and mortgages, writing insurance, etc., occupied all of his time, so naturally the express business was left entirely to Harry.

That business boomed also, as the town grew.

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Many more trains were put on, and more express packages came and went.

One day, after the division was established, Mr. Harbin said:

“Harry, don’t you want to take this agency? I have more other business than I can attend to. You do all of the work anyhow, and you might as well have it in your name, and make what you can out of it.”

Harry’s eyes sparkled. “Yes, sir, if the company will appoint me.”

“They’ll appoint you. I talked it over with Cummings when he was out last week. He likes you, and is willing to make you agent, although he said you were pretty young. That was his only objection, but he will overlook it in your case. Some of the business men gave you a good send-off, and that pleased him, too. So if you want it, we’ll have the agency transferred soon as he can get time to come out.”

“All right, sir, and thank you.”

“You don’t owe me any thanks; you have earned it. It isn’t a very big thing yet, but it’s bigger than it was,” responded Mr. Harbin, kindly.

“How much it grows in the future will de-

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pend, I suppose, on the growth of the town," said Harry.

"I suppose so. No telling now how large a city this will make," replied Mr. Harbin as he turned to his work.

The upshot of the matter was that Harry was appointed express agent shortly after. He had become well acquainted with all of the trainmen and depot employees, and was a favorite with most of them. They were a jolly set of fellows, and when they heard of his appointment, rallied and joked him a good deal upon his valuable promotion.

And now we come to another epoch in his career.

He went down to the depot as usual one warm, pleasant afternoon to meet the Chicago local passenger. Promptly on time the train rolled into the depot, and Phil Haverly opened the side door.

"What you got, Harry? Get a move on you and watch my car a minute till I run in and get a sandwich. Hold on; don't put in your freight till I get mine out. Haven't I told you that forty times? You seem to be getting dumber instead of wiser," and Haverly sputtered about,

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and changed the freight with a great show of impatience.

But Harry was getting used to messenger ways, and took his remarks for what they were worth. So he replied, "It must be because I work with such a dumb set of fellows."

"I guess so. Here is your money run. There's a P. O. R. in the run, and a C. O. D. This package didn't have any bill, so I made a mem." (memorandum bill). "The regular will probably be out to-night with the night men," and Haverly dropped lightly to the platform and dashed into the lunch-room.

While waiting, Harry amused himself by checking over his run just received; a short task, for it was only a few packages and two or three collections. Just then, Jack Dodd, the baggageman, came along, laboriously dragging a truck-load of trunks piled to the sky almost. It was the sort of load that baggagemen jokingly call, "two looks high."

"Hello, Jack. You caught it pretty heavy this time," laughed Harry.

"Yes, some troupe with more baggage than brains. I get rid of it on the Flying Dutchman, at seven, thank goodness," returned Jack, re-

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signedly, as he slowly pulled his load to the baggage-room.

A slight jar as the fresh engine backed up to take the train; the air-hose snapped together, and the brakeman stepped out and shook his hand, "All right."

Haverly came leisurely out of the lunch-room, munching a sandwich.

"They're talking of putting a division here," he remarked, as he glanced at the engine and noted that the engineer was still oiling up.

"Is that so? How do you know? Who told you?" and Harry's eyes sparkled with an eager look.

"Why, the Old Man called me up-stairs yesterday, and told me they were figuring on putting a division along here somewhere. They hadn't just decided where, but he thought this was the best place."

"Goody. I hope they will," and Harry's eyes danced a jig.

"It won't be any snap of a job, I can tell you, if they do put it here. They'll put a big safe here, and have a night and day transfer for money and freight. You'll have to meet every

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train in the twenty-four hours, and sleep between times," said Haverly, discouragingly.

"I don't care. I'll do it, if it pays anything," replied Harry, sturdily.

"It ought to pay almost as much as a main-line run, if they do."

"How much is that?"

"This run pays seventy-five dollars a month. But don't get your hopes too high; they may not put it here. You'll know in a few days. Good-by," and he swung into the car and closed the sliding-door, just as the conductor shouted, "A-l-l a-b-o-a-r-d," and the train moved slowly away.

Phil Haverly put his head out of the door.

"Don't say anything about it just yet, Harry." The latter nodded, and the door closed again.

He had been so engrossed with the idea of his possible good fortune that he had not observed Jasper Hardy, who, loafing near by, overheard every word.

Jasper was still loafing. He couldn't find anything that paid well enough to suit him, so he continued to let his father and mother support him in idleness. But now he pricked up his ears,

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and as he dodged around the depot, he muttered to himself:

"A division; seventy-five dollars a month. Why couldn't I get that job as well as Harry Baker? I'll try it, anyhow. I'll bet there's a lot of money to be handled, too," and his eyes gleamed with an avaricious light that boded ill for the express company's cash if he ever got the handling of it.

However, Harry, totally unconscious of a possible rival, was already building air-castles and whistling at his work. The bare possibility of his being able to earn enough to comfortably support his mother and the flock of hungry youngsters at home, to say nothing of paying something on the mortgage, made him happy, and he whistled and sang in a light-hearted way.

"What makes you so overjoyed?" inquired Jack Dodd, coming along after checking up.

"Oh, maybe because it's such a nice day," replied Harry, evasively, breaking off from "Old Kentucky Home."

"Didn't know but you'd had a raise in pay."

"Not unless I make it out of the business."

"Doesn't pay very much, does it?"

"No. Fifteen or twenty dollars a month,"

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replied Harry as he loaded his few bundles in the wagon.

"I wish you could make a decent salary out of it," said Jack, with honest sympathy, for he and Harry had become warm friends.

"Thank you, Jack, I may after awhile," and the kind-hearted baggageman strolled on to get his early supper.

Harry was strongly inclined to tell his friend what he had heard about the division, but he remembered his promise to Phil Haverly, and forbore.

Meanwhile, Jasper Hardy hurried up-town, revolving in his mind a plan to secure the agency for himself. He knew nothing about the business, but that didn't bother him. He only thought of the salary and the large sums of money he supposed he would handle. Foolish fellow! He thought all he had to do was to get up a petition signed by some of the citizens and he would be appointed agent. He actually had the coolness to go to Mr. Manfred's store and ask him to head the petition.

"The express company is going to put a division here," he explained, "and I want the job as agent."

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“ You want to be express agent? ” said Mr. Manfred, in amazement. “ What’s the matter with Harry Baker? ”

“ I have just as good a right to it as he has,” replied Jasper, doggedly.

“ I don’t think you have,” replied the merchant, quietly. “ Harry has done the work on a small salary, and if there is going to be a good thing I think he should have it, if he wants it. No use to talk,” he added, as Jasper opened his mouth to speak again; “ you know I haven’t a very good opinion of you, so you are wasting your time on me. You are foolish to try to get it, for I am satisfied the company would not appoint you.”

Jasper saw that he meant what he said, and with a sullen look turned and left the store.

However, he was not daunted by that rebuff. He made a thorough canvass of the town, and succeeded in finding a number of reputable citizens weak or foolish enough to sign his petition. For there can always be found people who will sign petitions under one pretext or another.

Some of Jasper’s signers were people whom he owed small sums, and who saw a prospect of getting their pay if he were put in the way

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of making some money. Others signed it because there was no pecuniary risk involved, and they did not care further. Still others signed because they lacked the firmness to say "no." So altogether Jasper secured quite a list of endorsers.

Then the foolish fellow thought the agency was as good as secured, and chuckled with glee over his shrewd move, and wore his hat farther on one side of his head than ever.

Jack Dodd heard of it, and hurried at once to Harry.

"Is it so, that they are going to put an express division here?"

"They are talking of it, I believe. Why? How did you hear of it?"

"Why, that loafer Jasper Hardy is around with a petition to be appointed agent. He says there is going to be a division here."

Harry recoiled in astonishment.

"Jasper Hardy! How in the world did he hear of it?"

"I don't know. But that's what he is doing. Better keep your eye out," warned Jack.

"Thank you, I will."

"The idea of that critter being express

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agent!" said Jack, contemptuously. "Why, I wouldn't trust him to run a dog fight."

Harry laughed. "I'm not worrying much about his ousting me, but I don't see how he heard of it."

"Oh, that fellow is always snooping around. No telling what he hears. I hope the division does come here. It ought to make you a good job."

"So do I," returned Harry, heartily, as Jack strolled away to his work.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPRESS BOOM

THE messenger that day was Harley Burt. After the runs were exchanged, Harry asked:

“Have you heard anything about the division?”

“Yes. They have decided to put it here.”

“Good,” and Harry could hardly keep from turning a handspring right there on the platform.

“Oh, it won’t be any snap, young fellow. You’ll earn your money, I can tell you.”

“I expect to earn it. Why shouldn’t I?”

“Wait till it’s thirty below zero, four feet of snow, and trains all snowed in,” winked Burt, gravely.

“Oh, you can’t scare me; I’m young and tough,” laughed Harry. “When are they going to make the change?”

“Cummings will be out to-night to see about it. They will build an office here at the depot,” and Burt closed his door as the train started.

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"Hear anything more about the division?" inquired Jack Dodd, coming up after the train had pulled out.

"Yes. They are going to put it here," and Harry's face was wreathed in a generous assortment of smiles.

"I suppose you'll wear a plug hat and eye-glasses," said Jack, gravely.

"No, sir, I'll wear blue overalls, and 'sich.'"

"That is, if Jasper doesn't get it away from you," laughed Jack.

"That's so. I had forgotten Jasper," said Harry, as he wheeled his freight to the delivery wagon.

"Guess there isn't much danger of that turnip getting it," remarked Dodd, as he went back to work.

Harry went home to his supper with a deep sense of relief. It was comforting to know that at last he was going to earn enough to support the family comfortably.

"Mother, the express division is coming here, and I am going to earn a lot of money," and he gave Mrs. Baker a bear hug and tried to waltz her around the room.

"Harry, Harry, stop! You will pull me over.

AN EXPRESS BOOM

There; now tell me about it," and she looked at her son with a happy face.

"Why, the express company is going to put a division here, and that means more pay for the agent. See?"

"What is a division?" inquired Phil.

"Which kind? Long or short division?" and Harry looked down with mischievous eyes.

"Oh, quit your joking, and tell us," said Mary, with mock petulance.

"All right. Gather round the frugal board. Turn your elbows in, and listen," and Harry dropped into his chair at the table.

"Jimmy," said his mother, reproachfully, "you never washed your hands."

Jimmy took one look at his soiled fingers, and hurried to the kitchen sink. He was gone a very short time, but as he looked fairly well, no one made any comment when he again seated himself at the table.

Then Harry explained to an eager, excited audience what a division was, as he understood it.

"An express division, as I understand it, children, is the place where a messenger gets out of his car and turns his run over to somebody else;

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then he goes to bed — or ought to. You see,” he continued, looking around upon his small audience, “a messenger starts out from the city with a car more or less full of packages, according to the time of the year. He gives out packages along the line, to the towns they are marked to, and when he has travelled a certain number of miles, he is supposed to be tired and want some rest, so the express company fix upon some town on the line and have messengers there waiting to take his run when he gets in. That town is called a division. The tired man turns all of the express stuff over to the new fellow, and takes his receipt for it. Then he gets out of the car and goes where he pleases for a few hours. After awhile that train, or another one just like it, comes back, and *that* messenger is tired, so he turns the run over to this first fellow, and he takes it back to where he came from. See?”

The children nodded, and Jimmy said: “Will there just be two messengers?”

“No, I understand there will be thirteen men running in here.”

“Oh, oh,” was chorused; and Alice said: “Will they all stay at our house?”

AN EXPRESS BOOM

"I hope not," replied Harry, with an amused laugh.

Mrs. Baker breathed a sigh of relief. "Now maybe we can pay something on that mortgage. It seems too good to be true. Do you know how much you will get?"

"The messengers thought it would pay about as much as a main-line run, that is, seventy-five dollars a month."

"My, isn't that an awful lot of money?" asked Mary with wide-open eyes.

"Well, it's quite a little bunch, but I guess I can carry it all right," Harry replied, gravely.

"We heard that Jasper Hardy was trying to get the office away from you," said his mother, as she refilled his cup.

"Yes, he got up a petition and sent it to the superintendent."

"Johnny Michael and me heard Jasper tell Mr. Barlow that he was going to be agent. He said he had a letter from the superintendament, and the man said he was going to make Jasper agent," put in Phil.

Harry looked at his mother and laughed.

"The 'superintendament' seems to be pretty familiar with Jasper. However, we will know

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all about it to-morrow," and he arose and looked at his watch, adding: "I must get back to the office. I have some work to do this evening," and giving the children a pinch and a hug, and kissing his mother, he hurried away.

The next morning when he went down to check the night run left by the through messengers, he found Mr. Cummings at the depot.

"Well, Harry, do you think you can run this thing all right?" was the latter's salutation.

"Yes, sir, I think I can, when I know what there is to do," replied Harry, respectfully.

"Oh, there isn't much more to learn than you already know. The worst feature will be, you must make every train in the twenty-four hours; and sleep between times. We will put up a small one-room building here, and you can move your office in it. We will also send out a large safe to hold the money transfer. The messengers will run from Union Pacific Depot here, and from here to Chicago. Your pay will be seventy-five dollars a month. It's pretty good pay, and I want you to attend to things in shipshape."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"That's all we can ask. Now I must take measurements for the office. It won't take but a

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few days to build what we want. We want to start the run just as soon as we can."

During the day he arranged for lumber and carpenters, the latter to begin work at once. He and Harry were around town nearly all day, attending to various details. Once during the day they met Jasper Hardy. Harry spoke to him civilly, but received only a surly scowl for an answer.

"That young man doesn't look as if he liked you very well," remarked Mr. Cummings with a smile.

"No, that is the party that sent in the petition to Mr. Lambert, to be appointed agent here in my place."

"Ah! So that is the man," and Mr. Cummings glanced back half-unconsciously. "Well, I could tell him that we don't get our agents by petition. And if we did, he wouldn't stand any show. I don't like the looks of his face. I'm a great believer in faces."

"I don't wish to speak ill of anybody, but he hasn't a very good reputation," said Harry, quietly.

"I can well believe it. There would be too

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much temptation in this business for a young man of his stripe."

Mr. Cummings returned to Chicago that night, leaving the overseeing of the work to Harry. He attended to it faithfully, and in a short time the office was ready. Then the supplies began to arrive. Large extra trucks were sent out, and then came the big safe. Various other necessary supplies followed, and in a short time everything was ready to make the change.

Foreseeing that the transfer would require most of his attention and time, Harry made arrangements with a drayman to deliver the express that came in for the merchants and business houses, he to do the collecting himself, later.

CHAPTER VI.

TRANSFERRING

THE express transfer opened up a new life for Harry, and he entered upon it with the resolve to perform the duties to the very best of his ability.

His seventy-five dollar salary looming up at the end of each month like a beacon-light, perhaps helped to make him more alert, if possible, and he determined to deserve it.

His office was the terminus of thirteen messengers. Some of them he knew, as having been on the original run, while the others were strangers, gathered from various runs and offices over the country.

Mr. Cummings came out the first day to get him started and look over the new office.

It was a new experience, getting up at one o'clock in the morning. Not a very pleasant one, either, for a robust, healthy youth accustomed

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to sleeping all night, but the moment the little alarm-clock began its atrocious rattlety-banging, Harry was awake, and sprang out of bed. Quickly dressing, he hurried to the station. Mr. Cummings had been called for the night trains, and was waiting for him to open the office. "How do you like night work?" he inquired, as Harry came along gaping and stretching.

"It seems a little bit queer to get up in the middle of the night, but I'll soon get used to it," said Harry, cheerfully, as he unlocked the office.

"I did night work for a number of years, in my younger days, but I couldn't stand it now; I'm getting too old."

"Who is the messenger to-night?" asked Harry.

"I'm not sure, but I think Olmstead brings in the first run."

"I'll run over and see if she's on time."

"How's Number 2?" Harry asked a moment later of Harvey Roche, the night railroad operator.

"On time," and the young operator sprang from one key to another, answering and receiving messages, with the swiftness of long practice.

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A few moments later, the train came puffing into the station. The side express door slid back and the messenger appeared in the opening. "Where's the agent?"

"Here," and Harry backed a truck up to the door.

"Save room on one end of the truck; I've got a pet for you," said the messenger as he began to heave out packages. "That's all except a two-year-old bull," he announced, a few moments later.

"A two-year-old bull! What, for goodness' sake, will I do with him?" gasped Harry, in amazement.

"Take him out of the car, feed, water, and curry him, and send him to St. Paul to-morrow morning," grinned the messenger.

"Oh, is that all? Well, heave him out," retorted Harry, who had recovered from his astonishment.

"Hardly. He weighs seven hundred with the crate. You'll have to get some help."

As quite a large force of men were employed in the yards, Harry had little difficulty in rounding up two or three, and brought them to the car. After much pushing, pulling, shoving, and grunt-

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ing, the crated animal was finally landed upon the truck.

At that instant, either from fright or mischief, the animal began to surge about in its crate, some of the men let go instead of holding it firmly, and ere they could realize the situation and steady the crate, there was a wavering crash, and the crated animal tipped over on the truck. Then it began to struggle and bellow and tear around in its narrow prison, and before any one could prevent it, the crate rolled to the platform, there was another crash and a splintering of wood as the slats snapped under the strain, and the young bull leaped to its feet, free from the little wooden cell.

It was all done in ten seconds. Upon regaining its liberty, the bull gazed about in a half-stupefied way for a moment.

“Don’t let him get away!” called out Mr. Cummings, excitedly.

In obedience to his words, some of the men laid hands upon the bull. That, of course, frightened it, and it backed away and started down the platform. With a wild desire to do something, he hardly knew what, to remedy the catastrophe, Harry sprang forward and seized



“HANG ON, SON; TAIL HOLT IS A GOOD ONE.”

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the departing animal by the tail in the vain hope of stopping it.

Of course his action frightened the bull more than ever, and it broke into a gallop down the platform, with Harry half-unconsciously clinging to its tail in the desperate hope that it might stop. For a moment the men were so dumb-founded at the accident, that they were speechless, then the ludicrous side of the situation burst upon them.

Olmstead, the messenger, leaned out of his car and shouted:

“Hang on, son; tail holt is a good one.”

“Head him in on a side track, Harry,” yelled one of the helpers.

“Throw him on 7 north,” shouted another.

“Turn on the air-brake.”

“Pull the emergency.”

These facetious remarks reached Harry's ears, but he was in no condition to joke back. The twinkling lights from the coaches, the lanterns flitting here and there, mingled with the hurrying footsteps of the passengers, all served to increase the bull's bewilderment, and it ran the faster. Passengers scurried here and there out of the way, and railroad men dodged between

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coaches and box cars. Just before the bull reached the end of the train and darted around the engine into the yards, Harry let go his hold and went plump into the arms of a drummer, who was staggering along under the weight of two heavy sample-cases.

There could be but one result. Harry went one way, the astonished drummer another, while the sample-cases were carried to the platform by the force of gravity.

Harry was soonest upon his feet. He was anxious to capture the bull, but simple humanity compelled him to stop and inquire after the condition of the unfortunate drummer. He assisted the dazed man to his feet, and said, apologetically:

“Beg your pardon, sir. I am the express agent, and was chasing a bull that escaped from his crate. I really couldn’t help running into you, but I hope you are not hurt.”

The man struggled to his feet, panting and blowing, and said:

“Mein Gott in Himmel, what you do? Where are my sample-cases, boy?”

“Here they are, sir,” replied Harry, respectfully.

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"I haf a mind to report you to the superintendent," cried the ruffled son of Isaac, angrily.

"All right, but don't forget to report the bull; he was more to blame than I," retorted Harry, and he started around the engine just as Mr. Cummings and the other men came running up.

The irate salesman glared after him a moment, and then gathered up his sample-cases and headed for the station.

"Did his tail pull off?" inquired Jack Dodd, who had heard of the trouble, and came rushing out to help.

"I don't know. He was going so fast I didn't have time to check up."

"Too bad," said the route agent, in a vexed tone. "Olmstead says that was a registered animal, and worth hundreds of dollars. It will probably get killed among all these freight-trains and switch-engines. I wonder where it went?"

"Probably making a flying switch somewhere in the yard," said Dave Cleary, one of the car-tappers who had helped in the transfer.

"It dodged around the engine here somewhere," Harry replied.

"It ran around this first string of freight-cars,

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down in the yard," called out the engineer of the passenger-train.

Just then the conductor called out, "All aboard;" for passenger and mail trains can't wait for bulls.

Mr. Cummings said quickly:

"Harry, you run back and wheel your freight into the office and lock the door; then come here quick as you can and we'll try to find this fellow. Here are your way-bills Olmstead gave me. Hurry now!"

Harry flew light-footed to do his bidding, and when he returned, the group of searchers were peering behind freight-cars, and flashing their lanterns here and there, trying to locate the missing animal.

Rounding a string of freight-cars, they looked down the yards. A hundred yards down the track they were on, stood a switch-engine with steam up, waiting for orders. In the middle of the track, in the glare of the headlight, stood some object, and they could hear the voices of men.

"There's your bull," called out Cleary; "he wants to fight that switch-engine."

"Which crew is it?" asked Jack Dodd.

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“It’s Bill Dugan with the ‘311.’”

The searchers hurried along, and when they came near the switch-engine an odd scene was presented.

In front of the engine stood the young bull, pawing the ground and bellowing in an ominous way. Evidently it was tired of running and proposed to fight. The switch-crew were trying to “Shoo” it away, but their efforts were vain.

“I’ll bet on the bull,” called out Cleary.

“The old ‘311’ could knock him out, but I don’t like to muss her up,” responded Dugan, who was in the cab with his hand upon the throttle.

“For heaven’s sake don’t kill him,” cried Mr. Cummings; “he is a very valuable animal, just escaped from the express-car. We must capture him some way without hurting him.”

“All right, partner, but he looks as if he had blood in his eye,” replied Dugan.

Even as he spoke, the pugnacious bull shovelled more dirt over its back, and then, suddenly lowering his head, made a dash for the headlight. Just as it was about to smash its adversary, the cowcatcher interfered; there was a confused struggle to extricate itself from the

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tangle, and then the fighting bovine fell, and rolled upon the ground. At that instant, a reckless young daredevil of a switchman, itching for fun and adventure, sprang upon the bull's back, and cried out:

"Here's your bull. Come and get him."

But before the men could reach him, the astonished animal sprang to its feet, and made off down the tracks again with the switchman clinging to its back.

"Hey, bring back that bull!" yelled Dugan, while the men roared with laughter.

"Come back, Mike, and we'll forgive you," shouted one of his switch-mates.

The men, headed by Mr. Cummings, hurried after them. The bull had gone but a few yards when it stumbled over one of the numerous switches scattered through the yards, and stumbled to its nose, throwing Mike over its head, and he landed upon his back in a pile of cinders. Freed from the load upon its back, the little bull darted across the tracks, and disappeared behind some freight-cars.

"Oh, dear, he'll be killed!" groaned the route agent.

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"He will if he puts up his dukes to every engine he meets," said Dugan.

"Mike," he called out, "are you killed?"

"Naw, that was only the first round; bring on your bull," and the young switchman limped back to the engine.

"He must have got a half-Nelson on you," observed Dugan, as he noticed the limp.

"He got something. Where is he?"

"You can search me. He's probably crawled in a box car, and going the rest of the way by freight."

"Come on, boys, and see if we can get sight of him again," and Mr. Cummings started across the yards, followed by the men.

"I must be at the office in thirty minutes. Number 3 is due then," said Harry.

"That's so, I had forgotten that other train," replied Mr. Cummings, in a vexed tone. "Well, you can help till five minutes before train-time."

But their search was in vain. They searched that part of the yards thoroughly. Flashing their lanterns around behind box cars, peering under loaded coal-flats, and even going so far as to look *into* empty box cars. But no bull.

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It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

"We may as well give it up until daylight," the route agent said, finally; "if he doesn't get killed to-night, we'll find him then," and they returned to the office, where Harry improved the time before Number 3's arrival by checking the freight from Number 2.

"There is a package short," he announced, a few moments later.

"Where is it going?"

"Joplin, Missouri."

"Olmstead should have taken that to Chicago, instead of transferring it here; it would make better time."

"Probably he left it in the car, in the mix-up," suggested Harry.

"Probably. Mark it 'short' from Olmstead, and ask him when he comes back. If he has it, he'll send it through on a mem. bill."

"Who comes out to-night on 3?" asked Harry, as he finished checking up.

"Heath, I think. You had better call Jackman now for the west; Number 3 is almost due."

In a few minutes the messenger came out of

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the depot lodging-house, gaping and stretching; the messenger safe was loaded upon the trucks, the west run checked, and everything ready for the train.

It soon came puffing and panting into the depot, runs were exchanged, Jackman loaded into his car, fresh engines coupled on to the trains, and in a few minutes, the two messengers went speeding north and west, and the first night's transfer was over — except the bull.

“Let's get a little sleep and turn out early and find that bull,” said Mr. Cummings, yawning, as Harry placed the money in the safe, and turned the combination. “I haven't had anything bother me as that has, for a good while,” he added; “seems as if it was a piece of carelessness.”

“I suppose so, but I don't think I was to blame,” replied Harry, respectfully, as he locked the office door.

“No, I'm not blaming you, and perhaps it couldn't have been helped. I don't know. Good night.”

It seemed to Harry but a moment ere the faithful little clock rattled him out. At the depot he was joined by Mr. Cummings, and together

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they once more explored the yards and freight-cars.

No results. They wandered out of the yards down to a row of tiny cottages and shanties that skirted the tracks. Suddenly Harry said:

“There is our bull, now.” He was right. In a little wee back yard, surrounded by chicken-coops and pig-pens, quietly munching a bit of hay, stood the young pedigreed animal that was to grace a thoroughbred stock-farm near St. Paul, Minn.

Mr. Cummings’ face lighted up.

“Thank goodness he is safe. I was afraid the company was stuck for a big bill of damages there. I will remain and watch him, and you go after ropes and men.”

In a short time Harry returned with the necessary assistance, and after an hour of manœuvring and work, the precious “express package” was lassoed and roped, ready to be led away.

Just then a shrill voice called out:

“Shure an’ ye don’t take thot baste away till ye pay the damages to Judy McGee.”

Looking up, Mr. Cummings saw a burly female, brandishing a huge red fist, coming out of the little shanty at the front end of the lot.

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“You fellows are in for it now, Baker,” laughed one of the men. “Judy has blood in her eye.”

Mr. Cummings mechanically put his hand in his pocket.

“What are the damages, my good woman?” he inquired, pleasantly, as the irate female stood before him.

The lady looked about her, shrewdly and critically.

“Two shlats bees broke on thot coop; th’ wan ferninst ye. It’s a wonder th’ baste didn’t thrample th’ chicks under fut; th’ little darlins. I got th’ settin’ uv eggs from Larry Donegon, an’ ivery wan uv thim hatched. Larry sez t’ me, sez he, ‘They’re th’ foinest brade uv chicks in th’ worruld. Th’ granmother uv these eggs wuz imported frum th’ ould counthry. Th’ hins lay wan egg ivery day, an’ live on th’ pickin’s.’ An’ there’s th’ paint scraped off th’ pig-pen” (said paint consisted of a thin brand of whitewash) “an’ th’ boords is all scratched over; an’ look at th’ hay th’ baste’s ait an’ desthroyed; enough t’ kape th’ cow a month, an’ hay costs money, as ye’d be afther knowin’ if ye’d iver bought ony; an’ I know they do be chatin’ a poor widdy

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in th' weight. See where th' terrier's thrampled th' yard, an' dug post holes wid his hoofs; a day's woork it'll be t' clane it oop. An' there's th' ash-bar'l tipped over an' a stave broke. Ashes spilled over the ground, an' me depindin' on thim t' make me soap fur th' summer's washin'. Och hone, sorry th' day whin th' baste broke into me beautiful yard," and overcome by thoughts of the devastation wrought by the terrible animal, the lady threw her tattered apron over her face and tangled hair, and wept — or tried to.

Mr. Cummings drew two shining silver dollars from his pocket.

"Here, madam, will this make good your losses?"

Mrs. McGee heard the jingle of money, and quickly uncovered one eye. Involuntarily she reached out a brawny fist and clutched the shining dollars.

"Ye're a foine mon an' a gintlemin, an' it's not Judy McGee thot 'd be afther worryin' yez for phwat ye couldn't help. Top o' th' marnin' till yez, an' whin ye gits in throuble agin, call on Judy McGee. Wait, I'll open the gate fur yez; a foine baste ye have there, an' probably perishin' fur wather, th' poor dear."

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With an improvised halter, a rope on either side, and a man behind to twist his tail, the reluctant bovine was led away, followed by Irish blessings.

It required a good hour's work before the bothersome young bull was again securely fastened in his crate ready for shipment.

"Did you note the valuation of that animal, on the way-bill, Harry?" asked Mr. Cummings, as he surveyed, with great satisfaction, the once more securely crated bull.

"Yes, sir. It was eight hundred dollars."

"Well, you see, by a little hustling and considerable good luck, we saved the company that eight hundred dollars. Just remember that, in your future work. Save the company every dollar you can, for they will have their eye upon you and your work. And never lose sight of this fact: if you expect promotion from a company or firm, watch its interests as closely as you would your own. Don't do your work in a slipshod, mechanical way, as though you cared for nothing but pay-day, but keep your eyes, ears, and mind alert, and further their interests in every possible way. Believe me when I tell you that they will keep track of you and your

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work. They are always on the lookout for an energetic, ambitious young fellow; but he must be thoroughly honest, for honesty is the bulwark and mainstay of business success.

“You have probably heard the expression, ‘There is always room at the top.’ The reason is, because so few ever really try to reach the top. Nine-tenths of them do their work in a listless, don’t-care sort of a way, caring nothing for their employers’ interests, thinking only of the pay-check at the end of the month. These men complain, and perhaps curse their company for not advancing them, when they haven’t deserved it. The men up-stairs must be energetic, wide-awake, thoughtful fellows, always working and planning for the company’s interests.

“But when they die or resign, their places must be recruited from the ranks. The company looks around over the country to find a successor. It is just as liable to be you as anybody, if your work has satisfied the company that you are the man for the position. I have known men to be taken from a little town of a thousand inhabitants, and given a responsible office that paid three thousand a year.

“I am aware, Harry, that this is a pretty

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long and probably unexpected lecture," said Mr. Cummings, smiling apologetically, "but, to be frank, I have taken an interest in you. You are young and, I think, honest and intelligent, and I want you to start out with the right ideas. One word more: the messengers running in here will come from various parts of the country. Some of them I do not know personally, as they have been working out of my territory. We do our best to pick honest, trustworthy men, but, of course, occasionally a black sheep gets in. Don't let any of them influence you to do anything that you wouldn't want me to know about. I don't ask you to spy upon the men, but just keep your eyes open for your own good. Now let's go to breakfast; I'm hungry, and I want to go back this morning. You can run things now, can't you?"

"Yes, sir. I think I understand everything; and I am much obliged for your kind advice."

"Don't mention it, my boy. I always like to see a young fellow start out right. I was young myself once."

Harry watched the iron-gray hair and frosty mustache of his superior disappear around the

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eating-house, with the relieved feeling that he had at least one friend in the world.

He locked the safe, and was poring over some way-bills a moment before going to breakfast, when a shadow darkened the doorway.

CHAPTER VII.

LUCK AND TROUBLE

HARRY looked up and saw Jack Dodd. "I see you've got that troublesome bull cooped up again, ready for shipment," he remarked.

"Yes, thank our lucky stars; and not a scratch on him."

"More luck than sense, considering that he was liable to get knocked galley-west any minute."

"That's what Mr. Cummings said. He was mightily relieved when we got the critter back safe and sound in the crate, I can tell you."

"Have you checked up yet?" queried Jack.

"Yes."

"Everything check up all right?"

"One package short. Probably Olmstead overlooked it, and left it in the car."

A shade of uneasiness passed over Dodd's face, and he said, quietly:

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"I doubt very much if you ever see that package again."

"Why? What do you mean?" and Harry looked up in alarm.

"I may be mixed up on the deal, but last night, when I heard of your excitement, I ran out to see if I could help any. Your truck was standing by the car, and the messenger stood in the door, looking up the platform after you. I was looking up that way, too, when all at once, out of the corner of my eye, it seemed as if I saw a shadow, or a man, I couldn't tell which, dodge out from the shadow of the cars, snatch a package from the truck, and dodge back. It was all done in a flash, and I wouldn't swear yet that it was a man, but I couldn't get it out of my head but what somebody or something snatched a package from that truck, so I thought I'd ask you if everything checked up all right; now that you find a package short, I'm inclined to think somebody thought he needed it worse than you did."

"Perhaps you're right. We'll know when Olmstead comes back. If it's lost, I suppose I'm stuck for the value of it."

"You'll have to watch things pretty close here

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nights. This is a bad yard for hoboes and toughs."

"I know it. That mix-up last night bothered me so for a minute that I forgot all about the other freight; but Olmstead was right there in his car."

"Olmstead wasn't watching that freight. He was watching you chase that bull, slapping his leg and laughing all over. I could have stolen a dozen packages right from under his nose."

"Well, it will teach me a lesson to keep my eyes open after this. But I haven't been to breakfast yet, and I have some work to do before 6 comes. My boss goes in on her, and I want to see him again, too."

Harry puzzled and pondered over the lost package on his way to breakfast, but could arrive at no conclusion in the matter, so he dismissed it from his mind for the present.

"What made you get up so early?" inquired Phil, who had finished his breakfast.

"Oh, I was out chasing an express package," replied Harry, as he broke a soft-boiled egg.

"Do express packages have legs?" asked Phil, wonderingly.

"This one did; four of them."

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"What was it?" asked his mother, as she poured his coffee.

"A young bull got out of his crate. We chased him all over the yards last night, and finally lost him. This morning we started out again, and found him in the Widow McGee's back yard."

"What did she say?" laughed Mrs. Baker, as she sliced more bread for Harry's healthy appetite.

"Oh, she scolded, and told us all the damage he had done to the pig-pen, ash-barrel, etc. I think the actual damage was about two cents, but Mr. Cummings gave her two silver dollars, he was so pleased to get the bull back safe. My, but wasn't she a tickled Irishwoman! She told him any time he ever got into trouble again to call on her," and Harry laughed at the recollection of Mrs. McGee's joy.

"Poor woman. The two dollars will do her lots of good, for she works hard," said Mrs. Baker, sympathizingly.

"I guess it was the easiest two dollars she ever earned," remarked Harry, as he took up his hat to go back to the office.

Mr. Cummings was waiting for him, and

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when they were alone in the office, Harry told him Dodd's story of the missing package.

"It is quite possible that some thief was standing there, and snatched it during the excitement. You will have to look sharp here nights, during the transfer. I see it is a pretty busy place, and lots of people around, coming and going. Above all, watch the money and valuable package transfer. You are liable to get large sums of money at any time, and jewelry. Get them into the safe soon as possible, and keep the safe locked. You don't want to lose any five-thousand-dollar packages of money, if you can help it."

"No, I guess not. I've a three-hundred-dollar mortgage to lift from our home, and I'm afraid it would take some time to do it, if I had to pay many such losses as that," replied Harry, smiling.

"Then keep your eyes open, and your mind upon your work."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Cummings."

"That's all we can ask. By the way, Martin goes in this morning. I called him just before I came out. He came in on Number 3 last night, and went right to bed."

"And who comes in from the west?"

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"I think it's George Parker. There's the train whistling now, and here is Martin," as a young man came hurriedly into the office.

"Yes, I overslept a little. This is the agent, I suppose. Got anything besides my safe to load up? Any hen-coops or canary-birds?" and Mr. Martin looked gravely at the young agent.

"No, sir, nothing this morning," replied Harry, demurely.

"I want you boys to help Mr. Baker take care of things out here; there will be enough of you," said the route agent, in a half-serious way.

"Sure. We'll watch over him like a mother," replied Martin, in the same vein. "Whom do I catch this morning?"

"Parker should come in. There's the whistle now."

In a few moments the train was in, and the runs were being transferred.

"I understand you lost a bull here last night," said Parker as they were lifting out his safe.

"We did. How did you hear about it?" asked Harry, in astonishment.

"I met Jackman on Number 3 out in Iowa, and he said you fellows were chasing all over

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the yards after a bull. Did you find him all right?"

"Yes, we found him this morning in an Irish-woman's back yard, munching hay contentedly, as though he hadn't done a thing. He goes north to-night on Gilmore's run."

"You were in luck not to have him killed, around all these freight-trains. It's better to be born lucky than rich."

"He didn't have time to get killed; we chased him too hard. Where's this coop of chickens going?"

"Some valley out in the country. They're billed here. 'Strawberry Valley,' that's it," said Parker, as he read the tag.

"So I've got to feed and water this pair of fowls till the owner calls for them," remarked Harry, with a grimace.

"Of course. You want to earn your salary, don't you?"

"I guess so," replied Harry, resignedly, as he lifted the coop, containing a handsome pair of fowls, out upon the truck. "A bull last night and chickens to-day; I wonder what will come next."

"That's only a starter, my boy," said Mr.

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Cummings, with an amused laugh; "you will find that almost everything on earth goes by express. You are liable to get anything in the live stock line, from a field-mouse to a royal Bengal tiger or a boa-constrictor. You will get used to it after awhile."

"All right. I can stand it if the other boys can."

Some one touched his arm, and Harry turned to see a short, heavy-set farmer. "Ish dere two schickens coomed by der express for Hans Yokey? Von ish a cock, und von ish a hen."

"There ish," returned Parker, tersely, before Harry could answer; "they are on the truck here."

"Goot. I vas to expect dem to-day, still yet already," and the stolid Teutonic face glowed with pleasure.

"You can get them in just a minute," said Harry.

"Yah, das ish goot. I am in no hurry yet. Mine bruder he send heem from Idaho still. He haf der schicken farm, und he write me he send two for nodings, eef I pay der express. Das vos er schnap, so I say, 'Send 'em along already,' und here dey are. I get two schickens scheap, I

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dinks," and a broad smile overspread Mr. Yockey's classic features.

"Wait till he sees the bill, and he'll faint dead away," murmured Parker, in an aside to Harry. "They've been transferred twice."

"Well, Harry, good-by. Be careful and watch the corners. I'll be out occasionally to see how you get along," and Mr. Cummings shook hands as the conductor shouted, "All aboard," and was gone.

"Come to the office and you can get your chickens," and Harry and the messenger started away with the rattling truck, and its load of freight.

"Yah, I coom."

When they arrived at the office Harry said:

"The charges may seem a little high, but they have come a long distance and been transferred two or three times."

"Vill it be more as a quarter?" inquired the farmer, innocently.

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid it will; a good deal more," returned Harry as he rapidly checked over the way-bills, while George Parker turned and walked into the rear room to hide his mirth.

"I tawt dat all express packages vas a quar-

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ter. I never got but two, und das vas bote a quarter," remarked the farmer, his face lengthening somewhat, as he moved about uneasily.

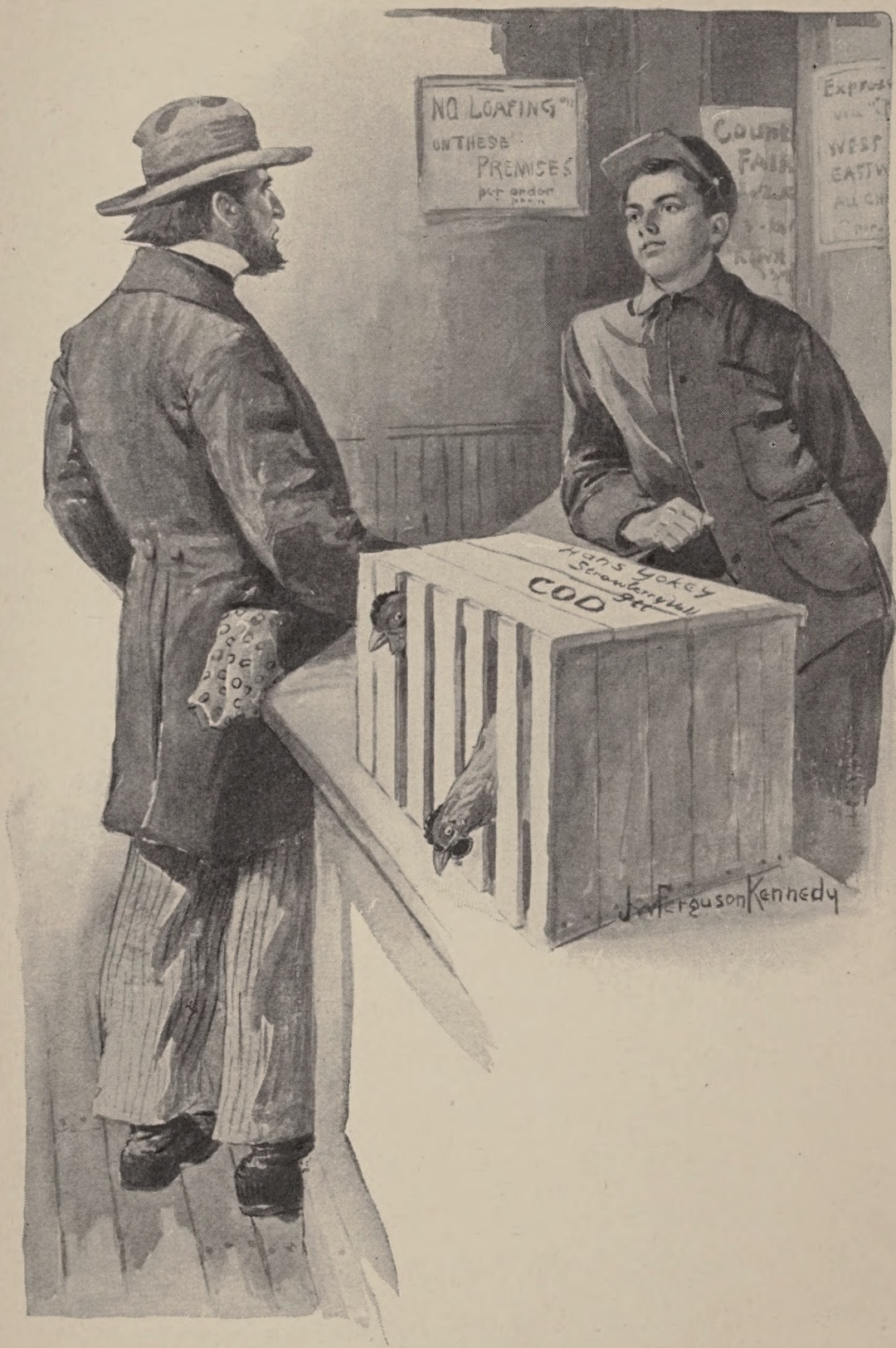
"The charges are \$4.80," said Harry, speaking in as pleasant and winning a manner as possible, with the hope of softening the blow.

"Four tollar und eighty cent. Vy, das is vort more as der schickens!" he gasped, his mouth opening with amazement, as he looked at Harry in a dazed sort of way.

"I know the charges seem a little high, but we can't help it; we didn't put them there. They have been handled by two express companies, and been over two or three railroads. Each express company must have its pay for carrying them. The advance charges on these chickens are \$2.10."

"Vos is dat about advance scharges? There vos no advance scharges. Mine bruder he gif me de schickens. I am robbed. I vill no pay," and the irate farmer danced about with rage, and returned the wallet to his pocket.

"No, you are not robbed," returned Harry, sharply; "the advance charges I referred to are the money we pay to another express company that handled them first. Our charges are added



“‘FOUR TOLLAR UND EIGHTY CENT. VY, DAS IS VORT
MORE AS DER SCHICKENS!’”

LUCK AND TROUBLE

to them, making the total amount \$4.80, as I told you."

"Four tollar und eighty cent," repeated Mr. Yokey; "vy, it would puy a pull calf almost still."

In the back room, the messenger, George Parker, was gently quaking with laughter at the old farmer's predicament. The monkey stood just in sight of Harry, and went through a pantomime of facial contortions and imitation groans, thrusting his hand into his pocket as though unwillingly, and withdrawing his purse, would look at it sadly and shake his head. Of course Harry must keep a straight face in spite of this side-show.

"You see, they are in an extra heavy coop," said Harry, by way of explanation; "twice as heavy as need be. Whoever shipped them, evidently thought more of their getting here safe than he did of the amount of the express charges."

"Yah; mine bruder he send 'em."

Harry's explanation turned the tide. The thoughts that his brother had made the coop extra strong and heavy to ensure the safe arrival of the fowls, softened the old farmer's heart, and loosened his purse-strings. He looked

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at the pair of handsome fowls in the heavy, unwieldy coop long and earnestly. Evidently thoughts of the faderland, and a loved and loving brother, came over him; a brother in far-away Idaho trying to do him a favor. With a sigh of resignation, he slowly counted out the money and said:

“Vell, I pay der scharges und take der schickens, but it vas von awful price.”

“I will wheel them out to the landing for you. I suppose your wagon is there?” said Harry, kindly.

“Yah; mine poy Schon, he vait for me.”

Harry wheeled out the crate, and helped the old man load it in the wagon, and returned to the office feeling very much relieved.

“Well, if that wasn’t a case of pure luck, I don’t know what is. You are all right, my son; the right man in the right place. If you are not president of the express company inside of ten years, then I miss my guess. Any agent who can corral an eight-hundred-dollar bull in a railroad yard in the night and get him back into the crate without a scratch, and follow it up by getting \$4.80 charges out of a couple of old Western hens, is certainly slated for higher work.

LUCK AND TROUBLE

It don't make any difference whether you've got brains or not; luck will take the place of them. Why, I'd sooner have your luck than a license to steal," and Parker paused and glared at Harry in a half-injured way.

The latter's eyes shone with mirth and self-satisfaction. "No luck about it. Just good management on my part. But I can't see what that agent out in Idaho was thinking about, to accept two chickens for that distance, without the charges being guaranteed, especially with that lumber shed of a coop. It was big and heavy enough to ship a cow in."

"No management about it, just pure luck. But come and check in my run."

The run was duly checked in, and then Parker said:

"What's a fellow to do between runs, in this benighted town?"

"Oh, eat, sleep, go to church and read tracts."

"Guess I'll *make* tracks for the lunch-counter, the first thing," and Mr. Parker disappeared around the corner.

In a few days the messengers had all reported in, with their runs, and the transfer office was fairly started.

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When Olmstead returned on his run, Harry anxiously inquired if he had been "over" a package.

"No, everything checked up all right. I put everything out here that belonged here. Why? Were you short a package?"

Then Harry told him the circumstances of the missing piece, and Dodd's suspicions.

"Probably somebody pinched it. I was watching so intently to see if you could outrun that bull calf, that a man might have stolen the hat off my head. Better write the forwarding agent, find out what it was, and the value, and let him expense you for the amount; no other way out of it that I know of: you'll have to pay it in the end, anyhow."

"I suppose that's all I can do. I'd like to know who took it, though."

"Probably a tramp; or possibly some professional thief, going through on the train, saw a chance to pinch something in the excitement. You may not lose another package in a year," said Olmstead, consolingly, as he handed Harry his way-bills.

"I hope so. I don't want to pay out all my salary for stolen packages," said Harry as he

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picked up the truck-handle and started for the office. The night was rather dark, and but few passengers or railway employees were on the platform. He was about half-way to the office, the big four-wheeled truck rumbling noisily over the board walk, when a form stole swiftly and noiselessly from the shadows, snatched a package from the truck, and disappeared in the gloom.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOM PURDY

HARRY saw nothing of this little drama, and when, a second later, a man carrying a lantern dashed past him toward the rear of the truck, he stopped and wheeled about in amazement.

He saw the man with the lantern leap from the platform and disappear behind a string of box cars. His first thought was, that the fellow had taken this method of stealing an express package, but a second's thought convinced him that the man was moving too swiftly to accomplish that feat.

While he stood wondering at the strange performance, the man with the lantern reappeared from behind the box cars, stepped up on the platform, and walked quickly up to where Harry stood motionless. In one hand he carried his lantern, and in the other a small bundle. He was panting and blowing with exertion. He

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held the lantern up breast high, so that both faces were visible in the rays.

“Tom Purdy!”

“That you, Harry?”

“What’s the meaning of this, Tom?” asked Harry in perplexity.

The former held up a bundle. “Is this your package?”

“Why, I don’t know. I haven’t lost anything that I know of, to-night,” said Harry, wonderingly.

Tom chuckled. “You did, just the same. I was coming down the platform, and just happened to see a fellow jump out from behind that box of coal, jerk a package off the truck, and jump back. I knew in a second that something crooked was going on, so I went after him. I’m a pretty good sprinter, and I got so close to him that he dropped the bundle and skipped between some freight-cars. I saw it was no use chasing him then, so I picked up the bundle and came back. He evidently didn’t want to be caught.”

Harry held out his hand gratefully.

“Thank you, Tom, you have done me a great favor. This is the second package I have had stolen this way.”

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"Pshaw; you don't say so!"

"Yes; come down to the office and I'll tell you about it."

They went to the office, where Paul Drake, one of the western messengers, sat indulging in a short smoke before going to bed.

Harry introduced the two men and then said, "I'll check this little bunch of freight first, Tom, and then tell you about it."

"Get out your way-bills, and I'll call it for you," said Drake, good-naturedly.

It was a short task for two. Drake called the items swiftly from long practice, and in a few moments remarked, as he tossed the last package from the truck, "That's what the shoemaker threw at his wife."

"Everything checks up all right, thanks to you, Tom," said Harry, with a look of relief.

"Don't mention it; glad to do you a favor. Only wish I could have got my fins on that fellow. I would have broken him of one bad habit," replied Purdy.

Harry laughed. "I don't doubt it, Tom. I would hate to have been in his shoes if you had ever got hold of him."

TOM PURDY

“What’s that?” inquired Paul Drake, looking interested.

“Why, a fellow stole a package from the truck when I was coming in. Tom happened to see him do it, and chased him so hard he dropped it,” said Harry as he locked up his money run.

The messenger gave a long low whistle. “Sneak-thieves, eh? If they are around, you want to watch sharp. They’re quick as cats, and slippery as eels.”

“I won’t take any more chances,” said Harry, decidedly; “at least, any more than I can help. It isn’t any fun paying for lost packages.”

“No, I’ve had a little experience in that line myself,” replied Drake, meditatively, as he poured out a volume of smoke that trailed upward toward the ceiling.

“What about the other package you lost?” asked Tom Purdy, as he glanced at his watch somewhat anxiously, adding: “I go west in about an hour.”

“Why, it was stolen off the truck, just about like this one was,” replied Harry, and then he told of the circumstances attending the loss of the other piece of freight.

Purdy nodded his head in a convinced way.

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"It was either the same man or the same gang of men."

"Many tramps and hoboes around these yards?" inquired Drake, as he scratched a match along the side of the truck and relighted his pipe.

"Plenty of them. We are firing them out of the box cars every day," Purdy replied.

"And the depot police are chasing them every day," added Harry.

"Your trouble is probably from tramps, and you want to look out that they don't hold you up for the 'long green;' there's some mighty smooth crooks among those fellows," observed Drake.

"I'll keep an eye on the truck all the time after this, when I'm bringing in a run," said Harry as he straightened up the freight, for Number 3 was his last night train.

"You'll have to get the man that comes in on the run to walk along and guard you. First thing you know, you'll be held up proper," said Drake as he put away his pipe and started for bed.

"What have you got to-night, Tom?"

"Oh, a string of empties and a few loads of

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farm upholstery. I must get down to the caboose, too, right away. Good night."

"Good night, Tom," called Harry.

In a few moments the office was securely locked, and he was on his way home to get a few hours' sleep before the morning trains were due.

A few words regarding Tom Purdy may not be amiss here.

He had been a freight conductor for years, and now stood on the extra passenger list.

A man about thirty years of age, of ordinary size and height, and to look at him, the casual observer would never dream of the bundles of steel springs that answered for muscles, or of the power, quickness, and energy concentrated in his frame. His arm was a bar of iron, as more than one man who had felt the weight of it could testify.

Good-natured and kind-hearted, but very quick-tempered; in fact, it was a byword among his mates that "the bristles would rise on Tom Purdy's back quicker than any man on the road."

In consequence of his quick temper, he was always getting into fights and scrapes, from which he always emerged victor, with any sort

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of an even show. His friends claimed he could "whip his weight in wildcats."

True and loyal to his friends, he would fight for them when necessary with his last ounce of muscle.

Of course, the officers of the road knew his fault, but he was such an honest, faithful fellow that he was rarely reprimanded; particularly as it was generally found upon investigation that he was in the right. He had many powerful friends and admirers "up-stairs," who, when Tom Purdy was called "on the carpet," saw that he was let off easy.

The secret of his tremendous power and energy seemed to lie in the fact that when he did anything, instead of going at it in a half-hearted, don't-know-about-it way, he unhesitatingly threw the whole strength of his indomitable will into the task to be done, and of course he succeeded, whether it was running a train or throwing tramps from a box car.

Unconsciously he had appropriated the old maxim, "What you do, do with all your might."

As an example of the way the officials regarded his fights, and the confidence they felt in his being in the right: the superintendent of the

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division was one day in his office, receiving despatches and giving orders, when over the wire from the western part of the division flashed a message that caused the operator to grin and his eyes to shine.

"Trouble out West," he remarked, as he copied the message.

"What's the matter now?"

For answer, the operator handed him the following telegram:

"The devil is to pay here. Tom Purdy has nearly killed his engineer and broken all the furniture in the office."

The superintendent looked up quickly.

"Who is his engineer this trip?"

The operator named a particularly mean, unpopular man.

"Good for Tom. I'll pay for the furniture," chuckled the official; and he did.

It was found upon investigation that Tom was in the right, and really couldn't avoid the row without backing down, which of course he wouldn't, so the matter was dropped. But we shall hear from Tom Purdy again.

CHAPTER IX.

A "FOWL" JOKE

IN a couple of weeks affairs at the transfer office had assumed shape so that Harry felt master of the situation; felt at home and content with his work.

Of the messengers, there were Frank Jackman, Paul Drake, George Parker, Gus Thompson, Ben Brown, and Sam Andrews running west; Phil Haverly, Harley Burt, and Tom Martin running east. These had their lay-over at Harry's office. In addition, there was James Olmstead, William Heath, and Howard Gilmore, running north, who brought out the west night runs from Chicago, turned them over to Harry, and went on north to the end of their run. Lewis Clark, another messenger, twice a day — morning and evening — brought in a little stub run from a neighboring city that was transferred to the main line in the various directions.

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Of course such a motley assemblage included all kinds and classes of men, with ages ranging from twenty-five to sixty. Veterans of two wars were represented, and the beardless youth, who was making his initial bow to the express world.

Some of them were inveterate practical jokers, and were never so happy as when perpetrating one of their execrable jokes upon a friend or foe; it mattered little which to them.

Perhaps the most inveterate of these jokers was Gus Thompson. The boys claimed he would lie awake nights to think up some scheme to harass an acquaintance or friend.

Harry's office soon became headquarters for conductors, baggagemen, brakemen, messengers, and various railway officials. Needless to say, the jokes, tricks, and pranks played there, together with the stories told, would fill a volume.

Harry was a general favorite with all, and while he attended strictly to business and took little part in the pranks and jokes, he nevertheless enjoyed a joke as keenly as the rest.

Another practical joker was a passenger conductor named Charlie Conroy. He was also a great chicken fancier, and was constantly boast-

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ing of his blooded fowls. Now it so happened that he very much wished to get started in a certain strain of thoroughbred chickens that were very rare in that part of the country. The eggs sold at a fabulous price.

One day on his run out, Gus Thompson caught Conroy's train, and after they were well out of the station, the conductor came back into the express-car. The first object that caught his attention was a pair of fine-looking fowls in a coop.

His eye lighted up in an instant, and he said: "Hello, Gus; where are these fellows going?"

"Out West somewhere," replied Thompson, indifferently, as he went on checking his run.

"I've been trying to get a setting of eggs from that breed for a year. Say, Gus," he added, insinuatingly, "if that old hen lays an egg on the run save it for me. The chances are it would get broken and never do the owner any good," and Conroy gazed longingly at the high-bred fowls.

"No need to do that, Charlie," said Gus, straightening up; "I can get you a setting of eggs out at the other end of the run. A friend of mine has some of these same chickens."

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"Do so, Gus, and I'll pay you double price and be your grandmother besides," cried Conroy, joyfully.

"Oh, never mind the pay; that will be all right. I'll get the eggs for you this trip, if possible," returned Thompson, pleasantly.

"Good boy. I'll do something for you some time," said Conroy, giving him a hearty slap on the back, as he started on his rounds of collecting tickets.

The messenger runs were much longer than the trainmen's, so Conroy returned first. Of course he dropped into the express office.

"Gus Thompson will probably leave some eggs here for me, and if he does, be sure and take good care of them, Harry, and I'll get them on my next run in."

"All right. If he leaves any with me, I'll take good care of them," replied Harry, pleasantly.

"It was very kind of Gus. I've been trying to find a setting of those eggs for a long time," remarked Conroy as he went out.

When Thompson returned, Harry said after they had checked in:

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"Did you bring some eggs for Charlie Conroy?"

"Yes, but I sent them on into Chicago with Tom Martin; I thought Conroy would get them quicker, and I know he wants to get them hatched soon as possible," replied Thompson, gravely.

"I'm glad you got them, and I hope he succeeds in hatching every chicken," said Harry. "I never saw a man so tickled over anything in my life. He has told every man on the division, I guess, about the fine chickens he is going to raise from those eggs."

"Yes, I hope he has good luck with them," and Thompson's homely face twisted about, like a man with the colic.

One peculiarity of Gus's facial expression was that one could never tell whether he was trying to laugh or cry.

The delighted Conroy received the eggs in due time; they were at once placed under a sober, steady, reliable hen, and he joyfully awaited developments.

In his exuberance he just couldn't refrain from talking about it. Conductors, brakemen, baggagemen, messengers, anybody who would

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listen to him, in fact, were regaled day after day with what the boys called "Conroy's chicken talk."

Slowly the time drifted by until the necessary twenty-one days for the hatching of the chickens had expired. About that time, Thompson took the boys into his confidence, and when the conductor went out on his next run he was greeted everywhere by the query:

"Have the chickens hatched out yet, Charlie?"

"No, but they will be when I get back," he replied to everybody.

But when he returned, he found, to his amazement, that the eggs had not hatched.

On his next run the queries were still more numerous and pressing. Even the call-boys picked up the refrain, and inquired:

"Chickens hatched yet, Charlie?"

So time drifted on until the refractory chicks were two weeks overdue, and Conroy almost dreaded to go out on his run.

Outside of his regular routine of duties about all he heard was:

"Chickens hatched yet, Charlie?"

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About that time he met Thompson in the transfer office.

"What do you suppose is the reason those eggs don't hatch, Gus?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Haven't they hatched yet?" asked Gus, in apparent surprise.

"No; not a sign of a chicken. Couldn't have been spoiled or rotten, could they?"

"Rotten! Pshaw, of course not! The man told me they were fresh eggs."

"Perhaps they are such high-grade chickens it takes longer to hatch them," suggested one of the boys.

"Something is the matter. They're two weeks overdue now."

The numerous inquiries after the health of his fancy chickens made Conroy a little bit uneasy, and on his return home he went to the hen-house, where the faithful hen was still hovering over the precious eggs and brooding over her expected family.

He hesitated a moment, and then taking one of the eggs, split it in two. The mystery was explained. Thompson had *hard-boiled* every one of them, and every man on the road knew it.

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We decline to print Mr. Conroy's remarks upon the occasion, and it was a long time before he heard the last of the query:

"Have the eggs hatched yet, Charlie?"

CHAPTER X.

TOM PURDY AND THE "BAD MAN"

It was a sweltering hot morning at the depot, but despite that fact everything was bustle and hurry. The morning passenger trains from the west, south, and north were in, and standing at rest, waiting to change engines. Passengers were scurrying here and there, carrying grips and bundles, and asking questions of everybody they met, as to which train they should take. Trucks were rattling and engine-bells clanging. "Hostlers" were rushing engines to and from the roundhouse, putting away the ones that had just brought in the trains, and bringing out fresh ones, which were to whirl the varnished cars to Chicago. The express office was a busy scene. Harry had checked out and loaded in Phil Haverly for Chicago, and was checking in Ben Brown, the incoming western messenger.

Conductors, brakemen, and messengers were clustered in and about the office, laughing, jok-

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ing, telling stories, and getting off "railroad talk." There was always something new to discuss. At present, the topic of absorbing interest was a Western desperado, who boarded passenger-trains at intervals along the line in Iowa, rode as far as he pleased, and then got off. He never had a ticket or pass, and no conductor had ever been able to make him pay any fare or put him off the train.

This dreaded individual carried a revolver, and was supposed to be a bruiser. As the average conductor did not yearn to get shot or whipped, he let the bad man ride unmolested.

If the conductor insisted upon a ticket or cash fare, the desperado reached for a gun, or gave the poor man a look that froze his marrow and caused him to pass along without further parley.

"I tell you, the company ought to put an officer on every passenger-train, and keep him there until that fellow shows up; then let him take care of the critter," said Al Manly, one of the conductors going in that morning.

"I think you're right, Al," nodded Ham Werden, another conductor. "I hired out to run my train, and I try to run it right, but I didn't agree to put myself up as a target for

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toughs to shoot at, or try to whip every prize-fighter that comes along. The company has detectives and policemen, who ought to attend to that."

"He never got on my train, so I never saw him," observed Manly.

"Well, he got on mine once, and I let him ride, too. He showed 'credentials' that gave him a pass on my train. He is one of the toughest specimens I ever ran across," said Werden, grimly.

"What about that Western tough? Has he showed up lately?" inquired Sam Custer, a conductor on the south run, who did not go into the "bad man's" territory, as he came into the office.

"Yes; Steve Burns caught him day before yesterday out in Iowa. When he tried to collect the fellow's fare, the critter pulled a gun, and told Steve if he didn't go along about his business and quit bothering him he would throw him off the train and run it himself."

"What did Steve do?"

"He let him ride, of course. The fellow had the drop on him. What could he do?"

Custer laughed and shook his head. "I'm

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glad that party doesn't have occasion to pass through my territory. I haven't lost any Western toughs."

"Why didn't Steve round up the train-crew and put him off?" asked Harry, who had stopped checking, and was listening with eager interest.

"Steve started to do that, but there wasn't a gun in the crowd, and that fellow was armed to the teeth. Somebody would have been killed, besides scaring the passengers to death, and maybe shooting some of them. So Steve let him ride. He only went about fifty miles, and got off."

"Best way," nodded Werden. "The company would sooner have it that way than pay for the damages and lawsuits."

"Boys," said Jack Dodd, who had paused at the door a moment, and was listening to the conversation, "I just want to live long enough to hear of that fellow climbing on to Tom Purdy's train."

"So do I," burst out Al Manly, with heartfelt emphasis. "I'd give a ten-dollar note out of my own pocket."

"I guess we all would, for that matter," re-

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marked Werden, "but there isn't much show. Purdy is only extra passenger man, and that fellow doesn't show up for a month or two sometimes. It's a question whether Tom could do anything with him, anyhow. The chances are the fellow would get the drop on him."

"I'd like to see it tried, anyhow," said Jack as he passed along.

"If Charlie Conroy had only caught the gentleman when he had that setting of Gus Thompson's eggs, he might have knocked his head off with hard-boiled eggs," remarked Ben Brown, as he finished checking in and lighted his pipe.

This sally raised a general laugh, and Al Manly said, as he glanced at his watch:

"Tell Charlie that — bless me, if it isn't leaving-time," and dashed out of the office.

In a few minutes every passenger-train had departed, and the noisy switch-engines and puffing freight-trains held sway in the yards.

"Who is this Tom Purdy the boys were talking about?" asked Ben Brown, as he tipped his chair back comfortably against the open door.

"He is a freight conductor; been on the extra passenger list for a year or so," replied

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Harry, as he retied a package that had become loosened.

"Must be a scrapper from the way they talked!"

"Not exactly. He's a very peaceful, jolly fellow, until you try to impose upon him; then look out for snakes, for he's a whirlwind. I've seen him in three fights myself, and each time he had the other fellow licked before he had time to get into action. He seems to be a man of iron, with muscles of steel. He is very quick-tempered, especially if he thinks you are trying to impose upon him, and he doesn't know such a thing as fear."

"I wouldn't mind seeing such a man tackle that Western gentleman," remarked Brown, as he crossed his legs.

"I rather dread the idea," returned Harry. "Tom is so quick-tempered and fearless that he would tackle the fellow if he were big as a mountain and bristled with guns. Tom is one of my best friends, and I'd hate to see him get hurt."

"Oh, if he is all you say he is, he'll take care of himself; don't you worry," responded Ben, carelessly.

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Two days later, as Harry was making out his abstract, feeling drowsy and listless from night work, Jack Dodd dashed into the office. He was bursting with excitement, and his eyes were snapping and dancing. In his hand he held a yellow slip of paper.

“Look out for war. Something is going to drop.”

Harry looked up quickly, wondering if Jack had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

“What’s the matter, Jack? What ails you?”

The latter chuckled, and handed Harry the slip of paper.

“Read that.”

It was a message from the operator in a small town out in Iowa, and read as follows:

“Look out for trouble. The ‘bad man’ just boarded an excursion-train going east. Tom Purdy, conductor.”

Harry gasped. “For heaven’s sake! Tom has finally got into the mess. Too bad.”

“Too bad nothing,” chuckled Jack. “Tom will take care of himself. Hurry up with your work, and come over to the office. The boys are gathering around there like flies to keep track

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of the game," and he disappeared out of the door.

Harry was wide enough awake now. Closing his books, he locked the door, and was soon standing by the open window of the telegraph-office with a dozen others, waiting eagerly for news. Inside of the room, by the clicking instruments, sat Charlie Braun, the day operator, and near him, in an armchair, smoking calmly, sat Mr. Glasser, the superintendent of the division.

"Anything doing yet, Charlie?"

The young operator shook his head. "We won't hear anything until they get to the next station."

"I'm afraid for Tom," remarked one of the men, shaking his head doubtfully; "he's so quick-tempered and foolhardy, he's liable to jump right on to that fellow and try to put him off the train."

"Of course; why shouldn't he?" observed another.

"That sounds all right on paper, but I don't think anybody here is itching to try it."

"I know I'm not. I wouldn't be in Tom's

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shoes for the best passenger run in the country," said another listener.

"Now you've struck it, Jim. That's me," and a general laugh followed. Then silence fell upon the little group.

The superintendent arose from his chair, and paced the little room with slow, measured strides. The air of expectancy and uneasiness in the waiting crowd outside was reflected in his face.

"What do you think, Mr. Glasser? Will Tom be equal to the emergency?" asked one of the men, respectfully.

The superintendent shook his head.

"I don't know. I'll be glad when we hear something."

A moment later Charlie Braun sprang to an instrument, saying:

"Here it comes."

Dead silence reigned as the little bit of brass clicked out the dots and dashes. With pencil and pad Charlie translated the message into English, and handed it to Mr. Glasser.

The latter read it, and smiled. Then, noting the eager, waiting group, he read aloud:

"The bad man has gone. The last seen of

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him he was rolling down a twenty-foot bank, train going forty miles an hour."

Such a shout of cheers and laughter as that crowd sent up.

"Bully for Tom; he's the stuff."

"Bring on your Western desperadoes."

"Wonder if that fellow wants any more free rides."

"Nothing like sand."

"I want to hear the particulars of that scrap," and so on.

"You ought to give Tom a chromo for that, Mr. Glasser," said one of the men.

"He can have the best passenger run on my division," returned the chief, tersely. And the men cheered again.

But let us take the wings of a bird and witness the Waterloo of that Western terror for ourselves.

A heavily loaded excursion-train had just pulled into a little station in Iowa. Groups of clean-looking country people, dressed in their Sunday best, were waiting to board the train. Among them was a burly, coarse-looking, flashily dressed man, who pushed the wondering people aside as if they had been cattle, and walked

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into the car next the smoker. Every seat was occupied. Two young farmers, with tanned, sunburnt faces, occupied one of the front seats, munching peanuts in a happy, contented way.

The man's eyes, roving about insolently, seemed to take note of their comfort.

"Here, get out of my seat!" he growled.

The boys looked up, hesitated a moment, and then, in their ignorance, thinking it might be the president of the road, arose and vacated the seat.

A few men with some spirit, sitting near by with their ladies, saw the insolence, and their eyes flashed, but not caring to get into trouble in the presence of a car full of women and children, remained quiet. The man dropped into the vacated seat, and sprawled back at his ease.

The operator at the window had noted the occurrence, and as the train pulled out, flashed the message over the wire that we read in Harry's office.

Meanwhile, Tom Purdy shouted "All aboard," and as the train moved slowly away, stepped into the baggage-car as usual, before going through the train to take up the tickets.

He knew nothing of the "bad man's" presence, or that every operator along the line was

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eagerly waiting to know the result. Passing through the smoker, he punched the tickets of all recent passengers, and entered the second car.

Most of the passengers began fishing out their tickets, but the man who had driven the boys from their seats paid no attention to the conductor's advent.

Tom touched him on the shoulder.

"Ticket, please."

The man looked up with a surly growl. "I hain't got no ticket."

"Then pay your fare." Tom spoke courteously, but firmly.

"I don't pay any fare. Git out of here, and quit bothering me about fare. I ride where I please."

He couldn't have taken a surer method of arousing Purdy's combativeness.

His voice arose clear and sharp above the roar of the train, as he said:

"And I tell you, you can't ride on this train unless you show a ticket or pass, or pay your fare. Do one or the other quick, or I'll put you off the train," and Tom made a motion toward the bell-rope.

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Then the Western terror exploded with wrath.

“You put me off the train! You! Why, I’ll shoot the head off of you, you lantern-jawed milksop,” and he arose from his seat and reached back into his hip pocket. “I guess you don’t know who you are talking to. I’ll show —”

But he got no farther. Quick as a flash Tom’s terrible iron arm, with its clenched fist, shot out and caught him on the jaw.

Passengers who saw and heard the blow declared it sounded like a butcher felling a beef. He crashed through the window and would have gone off the train had not Purdy caught him by the legs and pulled him back.

Without waiting an instant, Tom seized the dazed man by the collar and jerked him to his feet. Then running him out on the platform, he gave the would-be terror a shove and a kick, and sent him whirling down a twenty-foot embankment over which the train chanced to be passing.

We will add that nothing more was ever heard of that particular “bad man.” He had met his Waterloo.

Soon as Tom could get his breath he went

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back into the car, and began collecting tickets as if nothing unusual had happened. But twenty men reached their hands to him, and cried out:

"Bravo, conductor! That was worth the price of admission. If we had our way, we'd make you superintendent. That fellow has been an eyesore along this line for a year."

Tom blushed, and, like any brave man, got out of the atmosphere of praise soon as possible.

The operators had flashed the news of the desperado's boarding the train all along the line, and at whatever station they chanced to be, superintendents, train-despatchers, conductors, and other railroad men were gathered around the operator, waiting to hear the result.

Train-despatcher Varley and two engineers were at a little way station when the news came of the "bad man's" overthrow.

The despatcher chuckled as he read it.

"Tom will never know that I put that job up on him. I found out on the quiet last night that this 'bad man' was going on that train, so I put Tom in charge of it on purpose to see if they couldn't meet and get acquainted. I see they met."

CHAPTER XI.

A TUSSELE WITH TRAMPS

"DID you ever get any clue to the fellow that sniped those packages off your truck?" asked Jack Dodd, who had dropped into the office to gossip a moment while waiting for Number 5.

Harry shook his head as he went on checking Number 5's run. "No, I haven't the slightest idea, only that it was probably a tramp or sneak-thief. I may not lose another piece of freight that way in five years."

Jack opened his lips as if to speak; then, as if a new idea came into his head, closed them again, and remained silent.

Just then Number 5 whistled, and he started for the baggage-room. Phil Haverly opened the side door as the train pulled in, and called out:

"Lots of berries this trip, Harry! The agent instructed me to tell you to see that all perishable stuff on this run should be delivered

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promptly, to give the merchants a chance to dispose of it for supper."

"Mr. Cummings told me about that. The drayman is right here, ready to whirl it up-town in a minute," and Harry sprang upon the truck, and began cording up berry-crates.

"Well, well! Good boy. I didn't know you knew so much."

"Oh, we have a shining light here for agent. He knows more in three weeks than I do in a minute," and George Parker swung up on the truck.

"Hello, George! You go west?"

"I'm thinking strongly of it, if the Old Man doesn't telegraph me different," and Parker stepped into the car and hung up his coat.

"I've got the lad's first month's pay here," remarked Haverly, as he unlocked the little messenger's safe and took out a bundle of way-bills and money packages.

"Pshaw! and I won't be here to-night. I suppose he'll blow himself handsome," returned George, as he lifted in his safe.

"I get a cigar out of it sure. Guess I better leave it in the safe until we get to the office, Harry; somebody might steal it."

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"Yes, leave it in; I don't want to lose that," replied Harry, his eyes shining with joy as they lifted out the safe.

"Good-by, George. You'll find everything there, except one box 'short' for Council Bluffs," and Phil swung down out of the car.

"All right. Much obliged," and Parker closed and fastened the door, and went to work checking his run.

"Harry, I've been thinking up a scheme," said Haverly, as they trundled the run into the office.

"What's in the wind now?"

"Why, I was figuring if we could partition off a back room, and put in a couple of beds for the messengers, it would save them a night's lodging on the lay-over here. I talked with Mr. Lambert about it, and he fell in with the idea right away. He said they had some extra beds stored away at St. Louis that we could just as well use as not. One reason he fell in with the scheme was that it would lessen any chance of robbery, with two or three men sleeping here every night. He told me to talk with you and see what you thought about it. I haven't seen Cummings, but of course he'll do whatever Lam-

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bert says. What does your August Highness think of it?"

Now the idea struck Harry very pleasantly. To know that two or three men were within call during the night transfer would be a great relief to him. The loss of one package showed the possibilities in that direction, and he hailed Haverly's scheme with inward joy. He said:

"Wise lad! Your head is horizontal, and you get the thanks of the present incumbent of the office, for thinking up such a sagacious and economical scheme. If the other messengers concur in the plot, the deal goes through."

Haverly threw up his hands in apparent amazement.

"For the land sakes! You must have been to school. You said that just as easy; and I haven't a thing to give you but an old brass trunk-check," and he rummaged through pocket after pocket.

"Never mind. Just hand me my way-bills, including my pay-envelope, and that will be satisfactory."

"Ah, yes; I might have known it was your pay-envelope that caused that flow of language.

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Here, take it before you get off anything more," and Phil handed out the run.

Harry gazed lovingly at the long brown envelope, then, cutting off the end, sifted out a package of greenbacks. These he counted carefully, and said:

"Just seventy-five dollars. I'll lock this up quick, before somebody gets it. It's too late to put it in the bank."

"You act as if that was the first money you ever had," remarked Haverly, as he hung up his coat and prepared to call the freight.

"Don't tell anybody, but it comes mighty near it," replied Harry, with a laugh, as he locked it in the safe.

"Going to have a time with it?" asked Phil, absently.

"Yes, sir-e-e. I'm going to have the time of my life in a few months from now, if all goes well," replied Harry, as he sorted over his way-bills.

"How's that?"

"Going to pay off the mortgage on our home."

"Pshaw! Can you save anything on seventy-five dollars?"

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"Can I? If I don't save forty dollars every month, you can sell me for a yellow pumpkin."

"That's so. It doesn't cost as much to live here as it does in Chicago."

"Of course I won't buy any forty-dollar suits of clothes, or five-dollar theatre tickets."

"And your liquor and cigar bill won't be very large, I suppose."

"No; and I hope they will always stay just as small as they are now," replied Harry, vigorously.

"That's right, son. Be virtuous and you will be happy."

"I don't know how virtuous or happy I'll be, but I don't see any reason for using liquor or tobacco," said Harry, energetically.

"I don't, either; nor anybody else. It's just the natural foolishness of a man. He is full of it; born in him, I guess. Always wanting to do something that he hadn't ought to; keeping his left eye on the penitentiary to see that he don't go too far. Some of 'em even forget that," admitted Haverly, frankly.

Harry looked up in surprise at this honest outburst from the jolly, good-natured messenger.

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"If men know all these things, why don't they let them alone?"

"Why don't they? Just as I told you; from natural perversity and lack of sand. Why doesn't the morphine-fiend quit the vile drug that's killing him? Because he can't, in nine cases out of ten. He hasn't the stamina. I tell you, boy; take it up one side and down the other, a man is mighty small potatoes, and few in the hill. You'll find it out as you grow older, and see more of the animal."

"I've seen some pretty small specimens already, or rather felt them," said Harry, his mind reverting to the stolen packages.

"Oh, you haven't scratched through the veneer yet. Wait till you get down among the old sores," said Haverly, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Thank you; I don't believe I want to," returned Harry, quietly. "I'd rather think of men as being honest and brave, with only a few of the weak, wicked ones mixed in. My father was a brave, honest soldier, who would scorn to do a mean act, and I prefer to think of men as being like him."

"Well, it's better that way if you can do it," replied Phil, as he threw the last package from the

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truck. "Living in a big city has turned my stomach. I've seen enough meanness and cussedness in the last ten years to turn anybody's stomach. A big city is the curse of the world."

"You must have been hunting for wickedness," said Harry, shrewdly.

"You don't have to hunt for it in there; it's everywhere. Why, there has been two big five-thousand-dollar robberies right in the check-pen of the general office since I've been there. High reckless living and gambling were to blame for it. Some of the men squandered their money foolishly, and then tried to steal it back from the express company. Part of them are serving time to-day for it, and the rest are wandering in foreign lands."

"They couldn't have had very good bringing up," remarked Harry.

"Oh, they don't bring up boys in the city. Everybody is too busy. Just let them come up alone. If they pan out well, all right; if they don't, why — well, they don't, that's all there is to it. But, excuse me, I'm tired out. I had seventeen million cases of berries, more or less, to distribute along the line to-day, and it was pretty

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strenuous work. I'll just go outside and take a smoke."

"So you're one of the weak ones?"

"Yes, I'm a slave of Lord Nicotine," admitted Haverly, as he lighted a cigar and carried a chair outside, where he tipped back against the building with a sigh of content.

"These berries I'd better send north on the 'Flying Dutchman,' hadn't I?" said Harry, coming outside.

"Yes; they'll make better time than they will on Number 3."

"I suppose we'll have to see the rest of the boys about that sleeping arrangement."

"Oh, I presume so; but they'll fall in with it. Anything to save a quarter," returned Phil, in an off-hand way, as he flicked the ashes from his cigar.

As the messengers came in from their runs, one by one, Harry unfolded the "parlor bedroom" idea.

All were pleased with it. "Just the ticket," said George Parker. "We'll be handier to call on the night runs, and you can let me sleep five minutes longer."

Big Sam Andrews, who was an old war veteran

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and had run messenger for the company before the war, said:

“It suits me; but if they send those beds from St. Louis, I’ll bet a month’s pay that I slept on them before the war — twenty years ago.”

“Oh, well,” remarked Ben Brown, “your sleeping on them twenty years ago wouldn’t necessarily render them unfit for use now. They have probably been aired out and fumigated long ago.”

Andrews glared at him a moment over his spectacles and then burst into a laugh.

“No; but there’ll be enough live stock in them to start a ranch.”

“Instruct the agent at St. Louis to sell off the live stock before he ships them.”

“It’ll take ten gallons of benzine to put them in any kind of shape,” continued Andrews; “but I can stand it if the rest can.”

Accordingly, Harry wrote Mr. Lambert, the superintendent, to have the beds shipped, and in about two weeks they arrived.

In the interval, Harry had put a carpenter to work partitioning off a room large enough for two beds, so when the old relics arrived everything was in readiness to receive them.

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It chanced that Sam Andrews was in the office when the beds came in on Ben Brown's run.

The moment the former saw them he cried out:

"Same old parties. I knew it. Feel as if I had met a couple of old-time friends."

"If I were you, I wouldn't shake hands with them until after they had taken a benzine bath," remarked Ben.

"How's the benzine, Harry? Got it good and hot?" called Andrews.

"Yes, sir; everything is ready in the back lot," replied Harry, demurely.

"Then sentence of death is pronounced. Don't let me stay the execution. Throw a rope over the post and lead them to the slaughter," said Andrews, gravely.

Before night, by the united efforts of Harry and the messengers, the beds were installed in the little room. Bedclothes were provided, and that night the messengers slept in the office, to Harry's great relief.

Two nights later, when he checked up his night run going east, two packages were found "short." Of course, he couldn't tell whether they were overlooked in the car or not until the

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messenger, Gilmore, returned next night from the north. He waited with what patience he could, without mentioning the shortage to anybody, until the messenger returned, and then inquired anxiously if he had been "over" the two parcels.

"No," Gilmore replied, in surprise; "I put everything out that belonged here. I had your run all by itself, so I know."

"Then they were stolen."

"It beats all. Say, boy, you want to stop that, or this office will get a bad name."

"I suppose so, but I can't help it," replied Harry, in a discouraged way, as he started for the office. He kept his eye on the load of freight all the way, and when he checked up he felt relieved to find that it was all there.

His first thought was to write Mr. Cummings of the theft, but to his joy, the route agent came out on the next train.

"Well, Harry, how are things going?" he asked, as he shook hands.

"They were going all right until night before last, when I had a couple more packages stolen off the truck."

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"You don't say. That's bad. Must be a regular gang of thieves in these yards."

"It looks that way. The boys thought the other two pieces were taken by passing tramps, but this doesn't seem to bear out that theory."

"No, it looks like an organized gang. And we haven't a detective we can spare here now," mused Mr. Cummings.

"It will make my salary look sick, if this thing keeps up," said Harry, disconsolately.

"Yes, we've got to figure out some way to catch these fellows, soon as we can, but just at present you will have to keep your eyes open. We will help you soon as possible. Just now, all of our available men are working in the east. One thing, these fellows haven't tried to take any money; that's one consolation. They're evidently just small sneak-thieves, from their actions."

"But they may try to knock me on the head and take the money run, most any old time," said Harry, smiling faintly.

"They may, but I rather think not from present appearances. They act more like petty sneak-thieves. However, keep your eyes open, your

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wits about you, and be prepared. Do you carry a revolver?"

"No, sir. I haven't any."

"I'll have them send you one from the general office. We don't furnish them, as a rule, but I'll see that you have one."

Although he meant kindly, it was small comfort that Harry received from the route agent's visit. To feel that he was surrounded by thieves and robbers was not a pleasant thought. No use to talk to the messengers. They would just jolly and poke fun at him. They were not a very sympathizing class, as a rule.

The only solace Harry could find was a confidential talk with his friend Jack Dodd. He told him his troubles without reserve.

Jack gave a long, low whistle. "At it again, eh? That looks bad. You see they didn't wait five years before trying it again."

"No, and I'm all at sea. I don't know what to do, or what to think about it. Mr. Cummings said they didn't have any detectives that they could spare just now to look into the matter."

Once more Jack looked as if he were about to

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make a suggestion, but thought better of it, and remained silent. Finally he said:

“ Well, I would do what Mr. Cummings suggested; keep your eyes open and watch everything closely. I’ll help you all I can,” and with that Jack turned to his work, and Harry returned to the office, feeling anything but satisfied with the outlook.

The following evening he went down into the railroad yards to see one of the engineers in regard to an express package. The yards were large, with dozens of tracks and scores of switches. Strings of freight-cars, every size, color, and description, representing nearly every railroad in the country, were standing at rest, or being switched here and there by the busy, noisy switch-engines, eventually taking their places in a freight-train, which a little later in the evening was coupled on to by a big “ten wheeler” that coughed and puffed and panted as it noisily dragged its load of merchandise out of the yard and away over the country to the north, west, south, or east. The yards were a paradise for tramps. Scores of empty box cars afforded them a convenient temporary refuge, from which they sallied forth in pairs and

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groups to boil their evening coffee over a little open fire and devour the food furnished by the housewives of the town. Every freight-train brought in or carried out a greater or less number of these roving gentry, in spite of the efforts of the train-crew.

Riding on top of the cars, stowed away in empties, or clinging to the trucks and cross-beams beneath, they rode everywhere. The freight-trains could no more get free from them than a brewery could shake off the horde of rats that fatten upon its premises.

Of course this nomadic horde was made up of every class of men, from the unfortunate mechanic seeking work in far-away lands to the professional tramp and hardened criminal preying upon society.

Although people had been held up and robbed at various times in the yards, Harry thought nothing of danger. He had been around the cars and tracks, and knew the location of every switch and cross-track. He was well down in the yards when a tramp suddenly dropped out of an empty and confronted him.

"What time is it, boss?"

"I don't know; I'm in a hurry," returned

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Harry, edging away, for he didn't like the fellow's looks and actions.

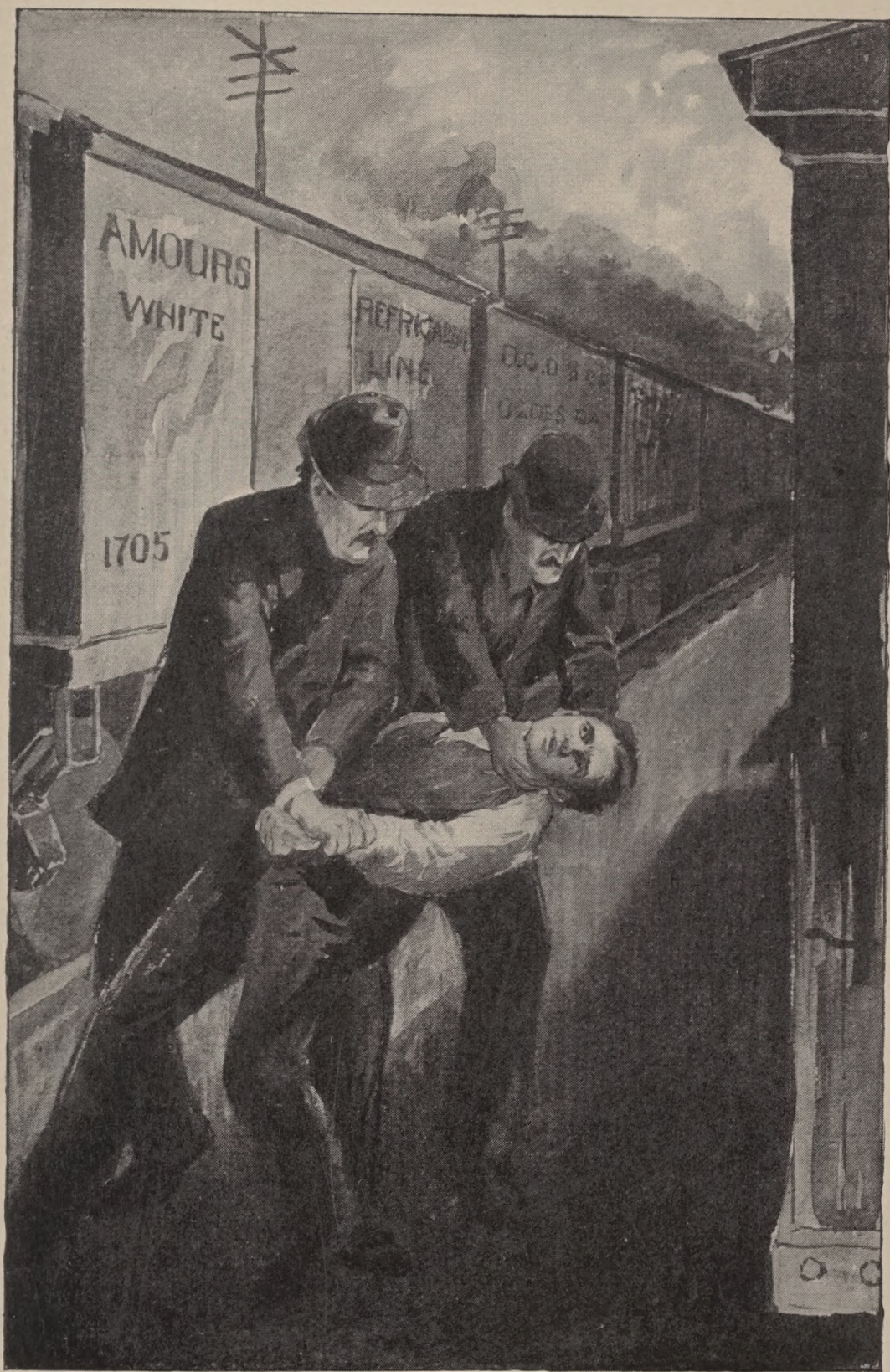
"Oh, hold on! Give me ten cents to get some bread. I ain't had any supper," and he sauntered insolently toward Harry.

"Get out of here or I'll call the police," and the young expressman backed away still farther.

The tramp laughed. "You wouldn't call the police; they're way up to the depot."

Harry saw that the fellow meant robbery, and, suddenly turning, he dashed down the yards. But alas for his hopes! At the end of the car he ran straight into the arms of the tramp's partner. The boy just had time to shout the one word, "Help," when the tramp's arm was around his neck in true garroting style, his breath was choked off, and the fellow was going through his pockets with the swiftness of long practice.

Doubled backward until it seemed that his spine must break, with that merciless arm choking the life out of him, Harry's senses grew numb, sparks and stars danced before his closed eyes, and, when the thug was through rifling him, he dropped to the ground senseless and apparently dead.



"DOUBLED BACKWARD UNTIL IT SEEMED THAT HIS SPINE
MUST BREAK, . . . HARRY'S SENSES GREW NUMB."

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The dastardly deed was done between two strings of freight-cars. As the tramp straightened up from his victim, there was the sound of hurried footsteps on the other side of the car. His partner held up a warning finger and whispered:

“Sh — stand still.”

The footsteps went past.

“Now duck.”

But ere they had taken a dozen steps, the person running down the other side suddenly stopped and dodged under the car, and the thugs found themselves confronted in that narrow lane by a man with a lantern.

The tramp who had first accosted Harry uttered a curse, and aimed a blow at the man's head. The blow was warded, and the next instant the thug received a crushing blow that hurled him flat upon his back, and Tom Purdy turned his attention to the other one.

That worthy, however, did not relish the treatment his partner had received, and turned to flee only to be met by one of Purdy's brakemen, who knocked him against the side of the car, took him by the throat and gave him a thorough drubbing.

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“What have they been doing, Al? What was that call for help we heard?” cried Tom, as he jerked the first tramp on his legs and marched him down to where the brakeman was tattooing the other one’s face with his brawny fists.

“Killing somebody, I guess. I stumbled over a body down here,” and the brakeman, giving the thug a final smash on the nose that flattened that organ considerably and brought the blood in a stream, desisted from his pastime, and turned to his conductor.

Purdy flashed his lantern around, and saw a dark object lying on the cinders.

“See who it is, Al, and I’ll watch these fellows.”

The brakeman, Al Hunter, swung down his lantern and scanned the features of the prostrate form. He looked up in astonishment.

“Tom, I believe it’s Harry Baker.”

“Harry Baker! Impossible! Is he alive?” burst from Purdy.

“His heart beats; but it’s Harry Baker sure enough.”

“Here, hold these fellows and let me see,”

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said Purdy, impatiently. "If it's Harry, I'll break both of their heads."

He knelt down with his lantern by the prostrate boy, and scanned his features anxiously.

"That's who it is; but what is he doing down in the yards, and how bad is he hurt? They've probably sandbagged him." He arose to his feet, and, drawing a revolver from his hip pocket, placed it in Hunter's hand with the words:

"If one of those fellows makes a move, kill him where he stands."

"We didn't hurt him, boss; he fell off a box car," ventured one of the tramps, with an uneasy look.

"You shut up!" snapped Purdy. "We'll let him tell his own story, if he ever recovers his senses."

He knelt again by Harry's side, and raised him gently to a sitting posture. The latter opened his eyes in a dazed way.

"Is that you, Tom? What's the matter?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. We heard you holler for help, and caught these two tramps in here. They claim you fell off of a box car, but I believe they're lying. How is it?"

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At mention of the word "tramp," Harry's faculties came back in a flash.

"Oh, I remember now. I was coming down through the yard when these fellows jumped out of a box car, and held me up. That smallest one did the work. He has my watch and what money I had with me. He nearly broke my neck, too."

Tom straightened up.

"Are you strong enough to sit there and hold my lantern?"

"Oh, yes. I think I'll be all right in a minute."

"Is the gun cocked, Al?"

"Sure thing," responded Hunter, grimly.

"Give it to the first one that makes a break, while I go through this one, for Harry's plunder."

Tom was so thoroughly enraged by their dastardly work that he was not very gentle, and when he got through with that thug, the latter had a fair idea of what it was to go through a corn-sheller.

"Watch, knife, bunch of keys, and three-fifty. Is that all you had, Harry?"

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"I think that was all," responded Harry, as he slowly got upon his feet.

Tom handed him his recovered property. "Do you feel strong enough to walk?"

"Yes, I'm beginning to feel natural again."

The former took the revolver from the brakeman's hands, and, turning to the captured thugs, said:

"I ought to mash you fellows' heads right here; but I'll let the law deal with you. March ahead, and the first one that makes a move to run or dodge gets his medicine. Go on, now," and the procession started toward the depot, Purdy directly behind the prisoners, lantern in one hand and revolver in the other, while Harry and Hunter brought up the rear.

They had gone perhaps a third of the distance, when Tom suddenly stumbled over something, and in throwing out his hand to save himself dropped the revolver.

The larger tramp turned his head far enough to see what had happened, and, uttering the one word, "Duck," they both fled away in the darkness.

Tom muttered an exclamation of disgust as he caught himself, and, snatching up the re-

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volver, darted after them. But darkness favored the escaping thugs, and they soon vanished in the gloom.

Harry, of course, could not run, and Hunter remained with him. When they reached the end of the string of cars near the depot, they found Purdy waiting for them, panting and disgusted.

"Nice trick for me to do, wasn't it?" he fumed.

"Never mind, Tom. I'm glad enough to get out of it alive; let them go," replied Harry, thankfully.

"I know, but I would have liked to jailed those two fellows," said Tom, regretfully, as they started for the express office.

"One thing sure, they won't let any grass grow under their feet, getting out of this yard," remarked Hunter, as he glanced back in the darkness.

Harry had left George Parker and Ben Brown in charge of the office, and they were tipped back comfortably, smoking and chatting in the warm summer air.

"Good evening. We brought back your agent," said Tom, as they walked into the office.

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"Much obliged. Take a chair," responded George Parker, as he relighted his pipe.

"You notice that we brought him back alive, too," continued Tom.

"Better yet; take two chairs," said Ben, politely.

"You might have kept him longer; we haven't taken in a cent," Parker observed.

"I'm afraid we kept him a little too long," replied Tom. "Better lie down awhile, Harry, and rest up for the night trains."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Parker, who noticed for the first time how pale and weak Harry looked. "He looks as if he had been run through a threshing-machine."

"About the same thing," responded Tom, quietly; "he's been garroted by a couple of tramps."

"Is that so?" and both messengers were on their feet in a moment.

"Yes, I was held up proper, and I don't want any more of it if I can get excused. I can thank Tom and Al for getting me out of it."

"I don't blame you. I was held up just once, and I am free to say that I don't hanker for any more of that kind of pie," said Ben, feelingly.

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"Somehow, when they hold a fellow up, those gentry fail to have the delicacy of touch that characterizes the pickpocket."

"The best of it was, Tom held up the tramps after they held up Harry, and got back everything they took from him," grinned Al Hunter.

"Sorry, now, I didn't break their heads as I promised," regretted Tom.

"Never mind. You put up a good imitation on one of them, and I massaged the other, so he won't have any trouble in identifying himself for some time," remarked Hunter, dryly.

"Why didn't you bring them along?" queried Parker.

"We tried to. We put them on the head end, but a coupling broke and they had too much steam for us," replied the brakeman, as he arose to go.

"Well, Harry, I hope you won't be any the worse for your scrimmage with those fellows," said Tom, as he arose and picked up his lantern.

"Thank you, Tom. I think I'll be all right. And I'll be under eternal obligations to you and Al for your timely assistance," replied Harry, gratefully.

"Don't mention it. We were only too glad

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to get there on time," said Purdy, heartily. "Good night, and don't go down through the yards any more after dark."

"Good night, Tom. I won't forget."

"Is that the shoulder hitter?" inquired Ben Brown.

"That's the man," replied Harry, as he watched the retreating figure, affectionately. "He knocked one of those tramps down so hard he had to help him up."

"He looks as if he might have a nasty fist," observed Parker.

"His brakeman don't look much like a spring chicken, either."

"If you had seen that other tramp after he got through with him, you wouldn't think so. He looked as if he had been run through a sausage-machine," replied Harry, adding, "and here's where these beds come in."

"Yes. Go in and rest after your frolic. Ben and I'll keep house."

CHAPTER XII.

CHASING A FORGER

HARRY went home after the night's transfer, and when he awoke, late in the morning, he felt stiff and sore from the effects of his frolic. However, he felt thankful that it was no worse, and quickly dressing, went down to breakfast.

His mother had thoughtfully kept his breakfast warm, and placed it on the table. He walked in rather a disjointed way, and Phil's sharp eyes detected at once that something was wrong.

"What makes you so lame?" he inquired.

"Oh, I was indulging in some athletic exercises last evening," Harry replied, as he seated himself at the table.

"What's atlety exincises?" queried Jimmy, coming to his side.

"Huh! I know," boasted Phil. "It's skinning the cat, and hanging by your toes, and turning over a pole, and a lot of things like that. I can do nearly all of them."

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"Yes, and you can tear your pants, too," interrupted his mother, as she poured Harry's coffee.

"Huh! I just teared a little bit of a hole in mine, and Billy Sparks ripped his'n clear down the leg, from there to there," and Phil marked the extent of the tear.

"You should be careful in your play, and watch what you are doing. But then, boys are a good deal harder on their clothes than girls, anyhow. Do you want another egg, Harry?"

"No, thanks, mother. This is plenty," replied Harry, sipping his coffee.

"Girls hadn't ought to tear their clothes like boys," persisted Phil. "They don't do anything but play with their dolls and chew gum. They don't climb trees and throw stones, and rassel and fight like boys."

"I don't care if they don't; they're just as smart as boys, and I'd have you know it, Mr. Phil Baker," retorted Mary, with a spirited flash.

"There, there, children; never mind," said Mrs. Baker, gently, but firmly. "Mary, you see if the dish-water is ready, and Phil, bring in your wood before you go to school. What makes you lame, Harry?"

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"Why, I went down in the yards last night about dark to see a man about an express package, and a couple of tramps held me up."

"Held you up! For the land sakes! I don't like that," and his mother gazed at him with affectionate concern.

"What did they want to hold you up for? Couldn't you stand alone?" asked Jimmy.

"I couldn't after they got through with me," replied Harry, grimly.

"What did they do? rob you?" asked Mrs. Baker, anxiously.

"Yes. They took everything I had. Watch, money, keys, and everything."

"Why didn't they take your watch-chain?" asked Jimmy, pointing to it.

"They did, but I got everything back again. I just had time to call for help once when they choked off my wind. As luck would have it, Tom Purdy and one of his brakemen happened to be coming along through the yards just then, and they heard me. They caught those tramps and gave them a good thrashing, and got all my things back. Mighty lucky thing for me," said Harry, thankfully.

"I think Mr. Purdy is an awful good man,"

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said Mary, warmly; "he stopped nearly a half an hour one day last winter and helped Sarah Densmore and me fix our sled."

"He has been a good friend of mine, I know," said Harry, as he arose from the table.

"You must be more careful, and not go down in the yards after dark. I didn't know it was so dangerous as that," and Mrs. Baker looked her maternal anxiety.

"Oh, it isn't dangerous. Probably wouldn't happen again in ten years. I just happened to catch the right kind of tramps in the right kind of a spot. I'll see that it doesn't happen again," and Harry picked up his hat.

"Probably they were some of the men that stole your express stuff."

"Maybe they were. We tried to take them to jail, but they got away from us in the dark," and Harry started for the door.

"Mary, where is Alice?" inquired Mrs. Baker.

"She is over playing with Stubby Hernbig."

"Well, you go and call her. I want her to go up-town and get me some thread before she goes to school. She will have time. Hurry up, and don't stop to play on the way," and as Mary

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departed on her errand Harry started for the office.

"How do you feel after your frolic?" queried Gus Thompson, who had come in during the night.

"Feel as if I didn't yearn for any more of it right away," replied Harry, as he unlocked the safe to get out the run for Number 6.

"I guess the tramps don't, either, from what the boys told me," grinned Thompson.

"No, I think not. Tom and Al gave them about the worst shaking up they ever had. Hello, Jack! Come in and look out; you can see more."

"Thought I'd come around and see if you were alive yet," smiled Jack Dodd.

"Oh, yes, I'm chipper as a skinned eel."

"Just about, I guess. Maybe they're the fellows that stole your express packages."

"I didn't think of that; but they would do it in a minute if they had the chance," said Harry, thoughtfully.

"Did you ever get any clue to those fellows that pinched your stuff?" inquired Thompson.

"Not a clue. The fellow that Tom Purdy chased is the only one that's ever been seen, and Tom only got a rear view of him in the dark."

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“Excuse me; there’s Number 6’s melodious voice,” and Jack vanished.

Along in the afternoon, while Harry was working in the office, a well-dressed stranger entered and presented an express money order to be cashed. These express orders were printed in three different forms, one of which did not require identification. The order presented by the stranger was of the latter form, and was made out to the limit, fifty dollars. It was from some obscure little town out in Iowa, and was apparently signed by the agent. Harry examined it carefully, but as it was properly made out and he was accustomed to cashing them every day, he cashed it, and the man, thanking him cordially, went on his way rejoicing, while Harry charged the amount to the company, and placed the order in his safe to be remitted with his next statement.

That night, Sam Andrews came in on Number 2 from the west. They had unloaded the run and checked it, and were chatting a few moments over express matters, as was customary with the incoming messenger, when Andrews suddenly said:

“By the way, Ranslow (the Iowa superin-

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tendent) told me to tell you to look out for a man who is cashing money orders along the line. They are made out from Hernville, Iowa. This fellow, who is some relative of the agent, got hold of a book of blank orders, filled every one of them out on the 'no identification' plan, and is out on the road cashing them. They are forged, and if he shows up here and tries to have any cashed, you are to arrest him, and notify Ranslow. But of course the critter may skip this town, it being a division point."

For some reason, the instant Andrews mentioned money orders a chill came over Harry's spirits, which deepened as the former proceeded, and when he had concluded, the young expressman leaped from his chair.

"Why, what's the matter?" said Andrews, in astonishment.

"Oh, nothing, only I cashed one for fifty dollars last evening," and Harry sank into his chair again.

"You did?" and the big messenger stared down at Harry.

The latter remained silent and thoughtful for a moment, and then said:

"The best thing I can do is to send a tele-

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gram to Ranslow, telling him what I have done; that will help locate the direction the fellow has taken."

Andrews nodded his head approvingly.

"Good idea. I'd send it at once."

Accordingly, Harry went to the telegraph-office and sent a telegram apprising the superintendent of what he had done. In half an hour he received a reply, stating that a detective would be there in the morning on Number 6, and to give him any assistance possible in catching the forger; if necessary, to leave the office in charge of a messenger and go with the detective.

Sam Andrews had not gone to bed when the answer came.

"Jackman comes in in the morning. He can keep house if you have to leave. It'll be his last run out," he suggested.

"I'll know better what to do after the detective comes. I have no idea which way the fellow went, but if he locates him, he may want me to go along and identify him."

"Could you do it?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, I'd know him in a second. A smooth-faced young fellow. He

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didn't look more than twenty-two; sort of a washed-out-calico complexion."

"He could have gone in any one of four directions, so I guess I'll go to bed, and let him 'went,'" remarked Andrews, with a yawn.

"I may have to 'let him went,' too, but I hope they catch him. It isn't a bit funny to have that kind of gentry around. I don't suppose I'll have to stand the fifty dollars, as the order is on the 'no identification' plan; but somebody will have to stand it, if they don't catch him. Why can't people work for a living honestly?" and Harry looked his disgust.

The big messenger laughed.

"Because they are too lazy; that's why," and he disappeared in the little bedroom.

Harry did the rest of his work that night in no very pleasant frame of mind. To think that he had been the victim of a swindler was very aggravating. However, it could not be helped now. All he could do was to await the arrival of the detective. He did not sleep very soundly from thinking over the matter, and the next morning breathed a sigh of relief when Number 6 whistled. The messenger Jackman opened the side door, and beside him stood a short, stocky,

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sharp-eyed man of thirty-five, whom the messenger introduced as Mr. Vincent, the detective who was looking for the express order forger. The officer said, briskly:

“Have you a man to leave in charge of the office?”

“Yes, sir. I’ll leave Mr. Jackman. Have you located the party?”

“Yes, he went to Fairview, and will drive across the country to catch a train on the T. M. & B. If we hustle, we may overtake him. We must follow on this train.”

They hurried the run to the office; checked it, and placed Jackman in charge.

“How long does the train lay here?”

“Ten minutes,” replied Harry, who was darting here and there, getting ready for the hurried trip.

“Think you can hit the side of a barn with that gun of yours?” asked Sam Andrews, who was an old Civil War veteran, and to whom, therefore, no kind of artillery possessed any terrors.

“I don’t know. I hope I won’t have to try.”

“There probably won’t be any need for it,

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but just take it as a precautionary measure," said Mr. Vincent, quietly.

Harry hastily scribbled a note to his mother, telling her where he was going and bidding her not to worry.

Then the conductor shouted, "All aboard," and they were soon flying on their way. It was a short ride and soon over. As they drew near the little station, Mr. Vincent said:

"We will go direct to the livery-barn. If that fellow drove across the country, of course he got a rig."

"Would they let a stranger have a rig?"

"Oh, they could send a boy to drive him, for that matter. Then, they would have to send somebody along to bring the rig back, anyhow."

"That's so; I didn't think of that."

By this time the train had stopped at the little village of Fairview, and they alighted.

The usual half-dozen idlers were loitering about, hands in pockets, with a curious stare for every stranger. No press of business cares annoyed these loafers. Their only concern was to know where their next meal was coming from.

"Is there more than one livery-stable in town?" Mr. Vincent inquired of one of them.

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"Nope," and the party evinced some little interest at being questioned and changed his tobacco quid to the other cheek.

"Can you direct us to it?"

"You go a block straight ahead, and then turn to the left. It's in the middle of the next block, on this side of the street. The first building beyond the yeller house with the roses in the front yard. Was you wantin' a rig?" curiously.

"I don't know yet," and Mr. Vincent and Harry started briskly in the direction indicated.

"Bill, I'll bet them's the fellers that's lookin' for somebody. I heard something last night about a feller comin' here to-day. Wonder who they're after?"

"I dunno. Probably after a burglar or something," and "Bill" lounged up to discuss the unusual event.

The detective and Harry walked into the livery-barn and accosted the proprietor, who was engaged in the laudable employment of sweeping the floor of his barn with an old broom.

"Has any stranger been here after a rig to-day?" the detective inquired.

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The liveryman paused in his work and looked up.

“ Yes. Why? ”

“ What kind of a looking fellow was he? ”

“ ’Twa’n’t a ‘ he; ’ it was a ‘ she, ’ ” returned the horseman, calmly.

Mr. Vincent’s countenance expressed the disappointment that he felt.

“ Has no man been here after a rig? ”

“ Why, yes. Jed Hardin got a rig to drive out to the farm this morning, an’ le’s see. Come to think, a travellin’ man wanted to be driv over to Conly, to ketch a train on the T. M. & B. We wa’n’t very busy just now, so I sent my youngest boy, Arthur, over with him. But they hain’t been no strangers, what you can call strangers, here after a rig.”

The detective’s eyes snapped, and he said:

“ What kind of a looking fellow was this travelling man? ”

“ Why, he was a smallish, young-lookin’ feller; didn’t look more’n twenty-two; light complected; had on a gray suit an’ a straw hat. Think he said he travelled for a grocery firm back East somewheres. I’ve forgotten exactly, but the boy’ll tell you all about it when he gits

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back. I never was much of a hand to remember such things, so I don't bother my mind about it. It's my business to let out rigs."

Mr. Vincent turned quickly to Harry:

"That's our man."

Harry nodded. "That's the chap, without a doubt."

"Why, does he owe you something?" queried the liveryman, curiously.

The detective was on scent of his game, and his whole air changed. Turning swiftly to the man, who was leaning upon his broom eyeing them curiously, he said, crisply, in a tone of conviction and authority:

"My dear sir, that party is no travelling man. He is a forger, and we are after him. Get out your best and swiftest team at once, and drive us over to Conly, just as quick as you can. We must catch that fellow before he reaches the railroad, if possible. Hurry, now!"

The effect of these words upon the liveryman was magical.

"Gosh all Hemlock! Is that so? A forger?" and he stared at Mr. Vincent.

"Yes, and hurry up. Don't stand there. He's a desperate fellow, and no telling what he'll do.

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He may throw your boy out of the buggy and drive on alone and sell the rig somewhere, if we don't catch up with him."

Mr. Vincent mentioned the selling of the rig as a spur to touch the owner's pocket, and it was very effective.

Dropping the broom, he ran to the door of the horse-stable, and yelled:

"Pete, hitch up Dock and Ranger to the light double-seater, just as quick as you can. Drop everything, an' hurry. I've got to drive a man over to Conly right away."

"All right. Have 'em ready in two minutes. Just got 'em rubbed down," and "Pete" came out of the stall in a profuse perspiration.

"That feller that Arthur driv to Conly was a forger, an' these fellers are after him," and the liveryman shuffled about excitedly, as he assisted in getting the team ready.

"Pshaw! Is that so? A forger," and "Pete's" fingers flew swiftly from buckle to buckle. In an incredibly short space of time, everything was ready for the drive, and the proprietor called out:

"All set."

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"How long have they been gone?" asked Mr. Vincent, as he stepped into the buggy.

"'Bout an hour, ain't it, Pete?"

"Yes, purty near. I know they went just before Jim Atwood was here to see about gittin' a rig for Sunday. That was about an hour ago."

"Well, I can't tell when I'll be back. Don't forget to hitch up the Widder Perkins' old family nag at one o'clock. She's goin' out to her sister's; an' say, Pete, if Al Blackburn brings in that load of oats, put 'em in the north bin," and the proprietor stepped into the buggy with the conscious air of importance of a person who is about to assist in saving the country, spoke to the spirited team, and they stepped briskly away over the smooth prairie roads.

"Think we'll catch up with them before they reach Conly?" queried Mr. Vincent, as they whirled along.

"I dunno. The boy had the ponies, an' they're good travellers for little fellers, but of course they can't travel with this team. This nigh hoss has made it in 2.32, an' t'other one ain't much behind. I raised the nigh one from a colt, an' broke him myself, an' tw. hundred wouldn't touch him. He's in a straight line from Rys-

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dycks' Hambletonian, though he hain't never been registered. I'm satisfied I could look it up an' have him registered if I wanted to, but I don't care nothin' about that. He couldn't travel any faster if he was registered. T'other one I bought when he was a two-year-old. He's a good animal, but he hain't got the stayin' qualities of the nigh one. That feller would travel from hell to breakfast 'thout feed or drink."

The loquacity of the driver seemed endless. Once the fountains of his great deep were broken, he rained anecdotes and reminiscences galore.

He gave the history of every farm and its present and former owners as they sped by. His father had settled there in the early forties, and he had lived around in that immediate vicinity all his life, consequently he was familiar with every foot of the country and knew the history of every inhabitant.

Half-way to Conly he was in the midst of a thrilling account of an Indian fight that the early pioneers had been through, when he suddenly broke off, and said:

"Well, if that ain't my boy comin' afoot, I'm a goat. Yes, sir, it's Arthur. Something's the matter."

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"It's probably as I suggested," said Mr. Vincent. "He has given the boy the slip and gone on alone, thinking to sell the team to somebody. He's a slippery chap, and wouldn't hesitate at anything."

"If he tries hoss-stealin' in this country, stranger, he's liable to git swung up to a limb," and the liveryman's eyes snapped with the fire of battle. "Hello, Arthur! What's the matter? Where's your rig?" and he reined up to meet a sturdy boy of twelve.

While the little fellow bore no evidences of weeping, he was evidently greatly worked up over something. The funereal expression on his face was almost pathetic.

"That man's took it and gone. He run away from me. He's a thief; he ain't no travelling man," and Arthur's voice trembled with indignant rage.

The detective chuckled.

"My boy, you made a wise guess. That man was a liar. He's no drummer."

"Jump in here, Arthur, and tell us about it. That feller's a forger, an' these men are after him. How did he give you the slip?"

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The boy climbed nimbly into the seat beside his father, and said:

"Why, it was about a mile ahead of us. We was driving along when he asked me to stop and pick him some flowers that was out in a field. I was glad to let Spot and Betty breathe a bit, anyhow, so I stopped and handed him the lines and went after the flowers.

"I was just picking them, when all at once he give the ponies a cut with the whip, and drove on lickety-split. I yelled at him to hold on, but he never looked around. Then I knew something was wrong. I watched him till he was out of sight, and then I started back afoot. He'll just about drive them ponies to death."

"More like, he will try to sell them to somebody," interrupted Mr. Vincent.

"He'll have a good time selling them ponies along this road," said Arthur, triumphantly; "everybody knows them."

"He wouldn't try to sell them until he got near the railroad so he could catch a train," suggested Harry.

"I think you are right there, and we may overtake him before he reaches town," said Mr. Vincent, hopefully.

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“Wish I had my hands on the scoundrel; I wouldn’t leave a whole bone in his body,” gritted the liveryman. “G’long, Dock; don’t let your whiffle-tree lag,” and he touched the off horse with the whip, causing it to spring ahead of its mate, and the team dashed away with increased speed. Mile after mile was reeled off, until they were near their journey’s end, when a man came swiftly toward them in a sulky.

He reined out, and as our friends came along gave the signal to stop.

“Hello, Berkly!” he called out.

“Hello, Zeke! Where you goin’ so fast?” responded the liveryman.

The former ignored the question, and called out, excitedly:

“Say, Jim, did you sell your ponies?”

“No, I didn’t, but a feller stole ’em, and we’re after him. Did you meet him?” replied Berkly, anxiously.

“Why, he stopped at my house a bit ago and wanted to sell me the hull rig. Said he was a nurseryman travellin’ through the country; that he just had a telegram that his wife was dyin’, an’ he had to git home soon as possible, an’ didn’t have any money. He offered to sell me the hull

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thing for a hundred dollars. I smelt a rat right away, cause I knew the ponies was yourn quick as I clapped my eyes on 'em. Then he wanted to borry fifty on 'em; said he'd come back an' redeem 'em in a week; but I told him I didn't have any money to lend, an' he drove on.

"I was so sure from his actions that something was wrong, that I hitched right up an' started out to find you an' see about it," and the farmer wheeled his horse about in the direction he had come.

"Glad you did. He's a forger, an' these men are detectives after him. He's tryin' to ketch the train at Conly; we mustn't lose a minute. Come on back," and Mr. Berkly touched up his team and sped away, followed by his friend.

Few words were spoken until they neared the little village. Then Mr. Vincent whispered to Harry:

"Have your revolver handy. We don't know what may happen."

No sign of the pursued had been glimpsed when they drew up at the little livery-stable.

"Hello, Al!"

"Hello, Jim!" and the two liverymen shook hands.

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“Seen anything of my ponies?”

“Yes, they’re in the barn now.”

“Good!” and Mr. Berkly breathed a sigh of relief. “Where’s the feller that left ’em?”

“I don’t know. He said to feed and water them, and went right away. Why, ain’t everything all right?” as he noted the eager looks.

“I should say not. He stole ’em away from my boy here. These men are detectives after him.”

The liveryman’s eyes opened, and he gave a low whistle.

“Is that possible? Well, I don’t know where he went. He’s around town somewheres, I suppose. Hain’t been gone more’n ten minutes.”

“What time is the next train due?” inquired Mr. Vincent, anxiously.

The man looked at his watch.

“They’s a freight along in about five minutes, but it don’t stop; just slows up a little going through town.”

“He’ll try to board that freight,” said Mr. Vincent, turning to Harry. “Let’s get over to the depot soon as possible. We may nab him there,” and he sprang from the buggy.

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They hurried to the depot, with guns at ready, but the fugitive was not there.

“He must have got wind of us, and turned back into the country,” said the detective, in a disappointed tone. “Here comes the freight. He won’t catch this train if —” His voice was drowned in the roar and rumble, as the puffing engine and long string of cars slowly rolled past the little station.

Both were keenly alert, and watched the platform closely, but no man in a gray suit was in sight.

One by one the box cars and flats rolled by until the laboring engine was far up the track. Then the caboose passed, and their hopes were at an end. The detective said:

“Well, we must look somewhere else. He isn’t far away.” But Harry caught his arm, and cried, excitedly:

“There he is now! Way up the track! He’s going to jump her!”

Mr. Vincent looked up the track and saw the man they were chasing standing by the moving cars. He stood motionless while several cars passed him. Then, making a sudden spring, he



"HE CAUGHT THE IRON LADDER ON THE SIDE OF A BOX
CAR AND SCRAMBLED NIMBLY TO THE TOP"

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caught the iron ladder on the side of a box car and scrambled nimbly to the top.

The detective's eyes snapped.

"We'll see if we can't show him a trick," and he hurried to the office. There, he wired the marshal of the next station to be on the lookout, and to send men down the track to meet the train, as the party would probably jump off before reaching the town.

Then he sat down to wait. It seemed a long time before that freight-train reached the next station, but at length a message came clicking over the wires:

"Got man. Come and identify."

"Good!" cried the detective. "How long before we can get a train up there?"

The operator looked at his watch.

"In about twenty minutes."

"That's pretty good, Harry," beamed Mr. Vincent, "if it's only the right man they've got."

Fortune favored him that time. It was the right man. Harry recognized the washed-out features instantly, when they reached the town and were confronted by the marshal and his prisoner.

The latter consented to go back to Iowa with-

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out making any trouble, and in an hour they caught a train back to Conly. From thence, they drove back over the same route they had come, the prisoner being handcuffed to the detective.

They were fortunate in catching a train at Fairview, so they arrived home about nine o'clock in the evening.

Mr. Vincent caught the first train west, and in due time landed his prisoner behind the bars. A word more will dispose of the misguided young man. When his trial came up, some months after, Harry was sent for as a witness, but the trial was put off on a technicality, and inside of a year young Hannon died of quick consumption.

So his case never came to trial. This is a true story.

CHAPTER XIII.

MESSENGER EXPERIENCE

HARRY was very tired after the long ride, and concluded to lie down on a cot in the office until train-time. Mr. Vincent took his prisoner to the depot hotel, and watched over him until train-time.

Harry hunted up John Briggs, the depot policeman, and arranged to have the officer call him, and then went to sleep.

It seemed hardly five minutes before he was routed out and informed that Number 2 was almost due. Gus Thompson came in, and, having heard of the money order trouble, wanted to know about it.

"He's in the hotel with Vincent," said Harry, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "waiting for Number 3."

"Parker will swear more than ever by your luck," replied Thompson, with a laugh. "I hadn't any idea you would catch him."

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"We were rather lucky," and then while he checked up he gave Gus the details of the capture.

Thompson went to bed, and when the train for the west was due, George Parker came yawning out of the bedroom.

"Hello! Get your man?"

"Yes. He is in the hotel with Vincent."

"Good! I understand it was Billy Hannon."

"Yes, that is the name," replied Harry.

"I've known Billy Hannon for years. He used to live in our town. He was always hanging around saloons and dance-halls from the time he was big enough to chase grasshoppers. My old man used to lick me every time he saw me with him. He never would work. Did you find the order-book on him?" asked Parker, as he took his way-bills.

"Yes. He had cashed five. We got all of the money but a few dollars," said Harry, as they lifted the messenger safe on the trucks.

"He thought he was smart enough to live without working, but he fell down," remarked Parker, sagely, as the train whistled.

It seemed to Harry, when he went home after the transfer, that he would like to sleep a week

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without a break. The next thing he remembered was hearing a shrill, childish treble call out:

“Harry ain’t shotted, mother; he is up here in bed.”

Then he recognized Jimmy’s voice, and opened his eyes to the sunshine and the singing birds. He was very sleepy, but the children’s voices, chattering below, helped to arouse him, and he soon yawned down-stairs.

“Who said anything about Harry being ‘shotted?’” he inquired, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table.

“I did. I said you wasn’t shotted,” asserted Jimmy.

“All right. I’ll take your word for it,” said Harry, sleepily.

“Did you shoot the other man?” inquired Phil, buttering a waffle, and burying it in syrup.

“No, we didn’t shoot anybody. Just pass me an egg, please.”

“There aren’t many waffles, children. You must go a little slow on them,” admonished Mrs. Baker.

“I wonder how many there are apiece. I’m

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hungry," said Phil, looking longingly toward the kitchen.

"I'll tell you. Let's count them," suggested Mary.

"You bring them here, and I'll do the divide act," said Harry, stirring his coffee.

"All right. Let Harry divide them," and in a twinkling Mary had the extra waffles on the table.

"How many?"

"Eleven!" shouted Phil, who had quickly counted them.

"How many times does six go into eleven?"

"Once, and five over," Phil and Mary cried, in a breath.

"All right. You folks eat the 'once,' and I'll take the 'five over.' How is that?" and Harry looked around, gravely.

"We are satisfied if you say so," said Mary, meekly, but a little dubiously.

"Good girl. Here you are," and he gave them a waffle each.

"Hold on, Jim Baker. You never stuck a tooth in that waffle. That'll never do. You will die of indigestion."

"I did, too. I bit it twice. And I couldn't

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ingestion on one waffle anyhow," protested Jimmy, stoutly.

"Well, here. I'll just divide them among you four piccaninnies. Mother and I don't care for them, anyhow."

"No, sir. You sha'n't. You've just robbed yourself and mother," protested Mary.

"No; I don't care particularly for them, children. And I know mother doesn't," said Harry, kindly.

"Don't urge him too hard. He might over-eat," advised Phil, with a longing look at the pile of waffles.

"No. You must watch out for my digestion," laughed Harry, as he arose from the table.

"Did you find out anything about your man?" asked his mother.

"Yes. We caught him and the detective took him back to Iowa this morning," Harry replied, as he picked up his hat.

"Did you get the money back?"

"Yes, all but a few dollars," and he hurried away to the office.

"Here, Agent. I turn the office over to you again. I didn't steal a thing or take in a cent," Jackman called out when Harry entered.

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"Oh, I nailed everything down, so I wasn't worried," retorted Harry, in the same vein.

"What do you do here all day, Jackman?" asked Haverly, as he began to get ready for his train.

"Oh, sleep, go fishing, shoot rats, talk politics with the agent here, and lecture him sometimes when he doesn't do right, and various other things."

"Well, you seem to have plenty of ways to kill time here. I was thinking of asking you into the city on your lay-over some trip, and show you the sights, but you seem to be all right here."

Jackman spoke with a peculiar accent, — a slightly Scotch twang — not broad enough to be called a dialect, but still noticeable. It was an accent that must be heard to be appreciated.

He waved his hand with a deprecating gesture.

"Excuse me. Not any more of that pie for the subscriber. I saw those much-vaunted 'sights' years ago, from the 'fire on the Lake front' up to the gilded halls of revelry. I discovered that there were a number of ingenious places for successfully divorcing oneself from his cash, but they don't get any more of mine. I'll

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just salt my little seventy-five per instead of passing it over to the sharks in that town."

Haverly laughed and said:

"So they used you pretty rough, eh?"

"I don't know what you city toughs call it, but that's the way it seemed to me. I hadn't more than landed before a fellow sidled up to me and said he knew my grandfather, or some other relative. Used to go to school with my mother at the same country school. Then he said there was a big fire down on the Lake front, and offered to show it to me. It was my first trip into a big town, and, of course, I was green. I was tickled to death to find an old friend, and followed him off like a two-weeks-old calf. But don't ask me to talk any more about it. Please pass the sackcloth and ashes."

"Too bad. Did you have much with you?" said Haverly, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Only about twenty; but it would have been just the same if it had been twenty hundred."

"Of course. There's a sucker born every minute, you know."

"I know it. I'm not wailing about it. Just charged it up to experience. I was a cub in the

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Des Moines office then. My, but I thought I was smart! I had gray matter enough in my head to supply a bus-load of college professors, according to my way of thinking. And say, I got some beautiful jolts before I found out that I didn't," and Jackman chuckled at the remembrance of his foolish days.

"I was born and raised in Chicago, so I got on to all those crooks before I was old enough to bite," said Haverly. "But once, when I was a lad about twelve, I saw one of those smooth 'artists' try to catch an old farmer, and he didn't. He pretended to find a wallet that the old fellow had dropped. Of course, the old chap knew he hadn't dropped any wallet; but he was greedy, like most of them, and thought if he could get something for nothing, he'd be so much ahead, and have a good story to tell the folks at home. When he opened it up and found several bills in it, his eyes fairly snapped. Of course, he knew the fellow expected a reward for his honesty; but, do you know, that old scamp had sense enough to pay the crook out of that particular wallet, instead of using his own money. He handed him a bill and thanked him. Of course, the money was counterfeit, and when the critter

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saw he was beaten at his own game he tried to get the old farmer to change it into silver; but nixy. The old lad claimed he didn't have any change. If it had been on a lonely street, or in the evening, the chances are he would have been banged over the head. But the fellow saw two or three of us boys guying him off, and people were passing and repassing; so he let the old agriculturist go off with his wallet and counterfeit money. After I got older, though, and saw more of those fellows work, I made up my mind that that particular one was not an artist, but just an apprentice, as it were."

"They don't get any more of my hard-earned shekels, if I know it," said Jackman, sharpening his pencil preparatory to making out his freight report.

"Here's your way-bills and money run, Phil," Harry called out.

"All right. Got much?"

"No; only a few bills. Here are three packages for Hallberg, a non-reporting office."

"Those non-reporting offices are a nuisance," said Haverly, with a frown. "Sometimes it's two weeks before I get my money. We only stop about a minute at those little dinky places,

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so if the agent don't have the exact change ready we have to let it go till some other trip. I wish the company would abolish non-reporting offices, or put a reporting agent there."

"Do any of them ever beat you out of the charges?" asked Harry, taking hold of one end of Phil's safe and pointing to the other.

"Yes, I lost a dollar and a half once," said Haverly, taking the hint and helping to load the safe on the truck. "A harum-scarum young operator got drunk, tapped the railroad till for forty dollars, and skipped. He owed the express company a dollar and a half, which, with my usual luck, meant me. Burt and Martin didn't get stuck for a cent."

"They're probably better collectors than you are," interrupted Jackman. "You ought to run through Iowa, where folks are honest."

"Excuse me. I prefer to run into Chicago, where I can see something once in awhile."

"Don't want to change runs then?" said Jackman, winking at Harry.

"No, sir. I'm satisfied. This run just suits me. If you want a change, why don't you take this office and let Harry have your run?" said Phil.

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“Me change! I wouldn’t have this office as a gift,” said Jackman, contemptuously.

“He gets as much salary as we do.”

“I can’t help it if he gets twice as much. I wouldn’t have it. I want my little regular sleep. I’d work on the section before I’d have this office and tend all the trains.”

“You fellows can’t stand grief,” laughed Harry.

“Maybe not, son. Not this kind of grief,” retorted Jackman, as the train whistled.

CHAPTER XIV.

QUEER EXPRESS PACKAGES

"WHO comes in this morning?" asked Haverly, picking up his grip.

"Ben Brown," Harry replied, starting up the platform with the trucks.

"I hope this won't be 'calf' day," Phil remarked, swinging his grip leisurely.

"I guess about every day is 'calf' day at this time of year, isn't it?" laughed Harry.

"Pretty near. But some days are worse than others. Some trips in we don't pick up more than half a dozen; then again, we may get half a car-load. The other day Tom Martin caught fifty-two. Maybe he wasn't disgusted, though," and Phil laughed as they pulled up to the side door of the express-car.

"What you got for transfer, Ben?"

"Oh, not much, but I've got a mighty lively pelican or crane, or whatever you're a mind to call it, here. Say, but he's a surly, haughty

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beast. He wouldn't make friends with the Pope."

"Where's he going?"

"Some fellow in Quincy."

"He'll go south to-night. In the meantime, I'll have to feed and water. Are the charges prepaid?"

"Sure. Advance charges and all. Don't suppose we would take a critter like that any other way, do you?" said Ben, as they lifted out a crate containing a big, homely bird that seemed to be mostly legs, neck, and bill.

"I should hope not. I wonder what they call it," and Harry reached for the tag on the crate. In a flash, a long, hard bill shot out between the slats and struck him a stinging blow on the arm. He hastily drew the offending arm out of danger, and rubbed it mournfully.

"Shades of Heenan, but that fellow is a warrior! He can strike almost as hard a blow as Tom Purdy," he remarked, looking at his ruffled adversary with increased respect, while Phil and Ben laughed.

"I can tell you, you don't want to monkey with that gentleman," remarked the latter. "I

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got a couple of good raps from him, before I learned the length of his sword-arm."

"They ought to send him up to Madison to take the place of 'Old Abe,' the Wisconsin war eagle," remarked Haverly, as he climbed into the car and put on his working clothes.

"He could do it, so far as scrapping is concerned, although his family isn't quite as respectable. He's more like a common tough," said Ben, as he swung down out of the car.

"Be a good boy till I find out your name," said Harry, coaxingly, as the yellow eyes glared at him defiantly.

On the tag was written:

"American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)."

Harry read both names aloud.

"Say, that fellow is fixed all right for names," remarked Haverly.

"That long-winded name is his Sunday name, of course," said Ben.

"Probably the one he uses when he attends swell receptions, or goes to college," put in Haverly. "Looks like a common old 'stake driver,' too," he added.

"Yes, he looks just like the big 'thunder pumps' we used to throw stones at when I was

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a boy," said Brown, waving his hand, tauntingly, before the slats.

Quick as lightning the horny bill shot out, and blood spurted from the back of his hand.

"There! Now will you be good?" called out Phil from the car.

"Yes; I pass. It was my fault," responded Ben, quietly, although he was forced to grit his teeth from the pain of the wound.

Harry hastily wrapped his handkerchief around the wound, while Brown gazed lovingly (?) at the irate winged warrior, with the remark:

"My friend, you seem to carry a chip on your shoulder continually. That's the third time you've tried to raise a row with me, and I'll tell you right here, if you weren't in the sacred charge of the express company and in the hands of their trusted agent, there would be something doing in your back lot."

If the "*Botaurus lentiginosus*" understood his remarks, it made no sign, but the glaring yellow eyes continued to pierce him with a look of hate, as it stood perfectly motionless.

"'Trusted agent' is good," called Haverly,

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with a laugh. "Next time you run up against a feathered Bob Fitzsimmons, let him alone."

"Never mind, Ben, I'll put some salve on your hand when we get to the office," said Harry, consolingly, as the truck rattled along.

"Mamma, but that hurts," remarked the former, as he looked at the blood-stained handkerchief.

"It will teach me to watch out for him while he's in the office," said Harry. "I wonder what they feed him?"

"Mostly brad-awls, I guess. If it were me, I'd feed him arsenic," retorted the suffering Ben.

"I didn't know they were so vicious," Harry said, as the truck stopped at the office door.

"I didn't, either; but I do now."

Of course the usual crowd of curiosity-seekers soon gathered around the truck to gaze at the homely bird and ask questions.

"What you got here, Harry?"

"Oh, that's a 'What is it?'" said Harry, winking at Ben.

"Looks like a common old 'fly-up-the-creek.' Is it coming to live with us?"

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"No; just a transfer. Going to some fellow down in Quincy."

"I thought nobody here would be fool enough to buy such a looking critter."

"Maybe some farmer is going to use it for a scarecrow to keep the blackbirds out of the corn," and the speaker stooped and peered through the slats at the silent bird.

The fact that he was slightly beyond neck reach saved his right eye. For the long beak shot out, and the tip of the winged warrior's bill made a livid spot just below that much-prized optic.

For an instant everybody gasped, as the man leaped back. Then, when they saw that his eye had escaped, a general laugh broke out.

"Did you run up against a snag, Bill?"

"Pretty handy with his mitt, all right."

"Guess I'll talk to that party over the telephone."

"Say, but don't he strike a nasty blow!"

"If I could strike that hard and quick, I'd be in the ring inside of a week."

"How does it feel, Bill?" laughed another.

"It doesn't feel very sniptious, but I'm thankful to think I saved my eye," was the reply, as

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he wiped that useful organ with his handkerchief.

"How long does that pugilist sojourn here, Harry?"

"He goes south to-night."

"What's the matter with giving a boxing exhibition in your office and charging admittance?"

"All right. Bring on your boxers," laughed Harry, as he and Ben cautiously took hold of the crate and lifted it from the truck.

"Al, go and get that fifty-dollar bulldog of yours; I'll bet a five on him."

"He's a fool if he does," remarked another; "that bird would have the dog's eyes out before he could get his mouth open."

"Excuse me," the owner of the fighting canine replied. "I don't mind him fighting anything in the dog line, but when it comes to tackling a pickaxe run by lightning, I pass."

"How do you get near enough to feed the animal?" asked another.

"I don't know. I'll let him fast until to-night, I guess," Harry replied, as they carried the crate into the office.

"That's easy," remarked one of the crowd

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that had followed into the office; "just catch a frog and hold it out in front of the coop and let him spear it like he did Bill's eye," and everybody laughed.

"That's all right; but who's going to hold the frog?"

"Baker, of course; he's agent."

"Excuse me. I'll worry along without holding any frogs for that gentleman to spear," Harry remarked, as he and Ben began checking the run, and the crowd slowly melted away.

As a curious coincidence, the following morning on Number 6 George Parker brought in a deer.

"Another pet for you," he called out, as the train stopped, and Harry pulled up alongside of the car.

"What in the world is it now? I caught a bittern yesterday that snapped everybody's eyes out and bored a hole in Ben's hand."

"What's a bittern?" asked Parker, as he began to shove out the freight.

"Oh, it's a big bird with a long bill and a bad disposition. Where does this deer go?"

"Out west of Davenport somewhere. It's billed to Davenport."

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"Just so it don't bite, I don't care."

"No, it's gentle. Came from Wisconsin. It's a pet for somebody, I guess."

"Glad I don't have to bother with it," said Harley Burt, the ingoing messenger.

"Oh, you needn't worry; you'll get calves enough before you get to Chicago," laughed Parker, as he and Harry started for the office.

"I know it, and that's why I don't hanker for any live four-legged freight."

The deer naturally drew a larger audience than the bittern of the previous day.

A number of passengers, waiting for their trains, gathered around.

"They like fine-cut chewing-tobacco better than a man," remarked a gray-haired, keen-eyed man to a friend, as they contemplated the animal.

"Is that so?" asked the other, incredulously.

"Yes. Look here," and the gentleman took out his tobacco-box, pinched off a chew and handed it through the slats of the crate.

The delicate muzzle met his offering half-way, took the bit of tobacco eagerly, chewed it a moment gratefully, and then, swallowing it, pricked up the pretty ears for more.

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“Well, that’s the first time I ever knew that. My respect for a deer drops forty per cent. right here.”

The gray-haired man laughed.

“Why? Tobacco is a plant the same as grass, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but you give a deer the choice between grass and tobacco, and he will take the grass, I’ll guarantee.”

“I suppose so; but the fact remains that they like the ‘weed.’ I think most all animals do, for that matter.”

Harry was dumbfounded. He had never heard of such a thing. The idea of a deer chewing tobacco seemed absurd. But here was a deer doing that identical thing, and apparently enjoying it.

George Parker nudged him.

“You see that deer was raised in Wisconsin, where they grow tobacco. It probably acquired the tobacco habit before it was weaned.”

“It has mighty poor taste,” was the disgusted reply.

“That deer can eat what you can’t, Harry,” laughed one of the men.

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"So can a hog," was the retort, and the laugh was on the would-be joker.

One morning Jackman brought in a large owl, with eyes big as a silver dollar. Tom Martin took the run in, and the wise-looking bird caught his attention the first thing.

"Hello, Frank. Is this your side partner?"

"Yes, that's Solomon," replied Jackman, as he locked his safe and pulled it to the door.

"Is he very talkative?" inquired Martin.

"No. Seems to hang on to all of his wisdom. He may know a great deal, but he's awful discreet in telling it."

"He knew whom he was travelling with," observed Martin, getting into his working clothes.

"I guess so. But I don't think he will talk enough to distract your attention from your work."

Harry walked up to the crate and gazed curiously at the big bird. It stared back at him without blinking or ruffling a feather.

"Sure it isn't stuffed?" he called to Jackman.

"No, I'm not sure. In fact I rather think it *is* stuffed," returned the messenger. "There was a lot of grub in the box when I got it, and

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as it has disappeared I rather think Solomon has stuffed himself with it."

"I see. Has this fellow got a big name, too?"

"Yes. Two or three names tacked on to the crate. I tried to pronounce some of them, but got the lockjaw, so the brakeman had to pry open my mouth with the axe."

Harry stooped and spelled out: "Scotiaptex Cinereum." Below, in plain English, was the name, "Great Gray Owl."

"No wonder it don't talk," said Tom; "it's loaded down with name so it can't."

"Maybe it is. I didn't think of that. I supposed it was studying out something, or thinking of its sins. We'll let it go at that. The critter is going to Philadelphia, where it can have a good rest. You'll find a box 'over' for Indianapolis. I made a mem. for it. So long," and Jackman and Harry rumbled the trucks away to the office, leaving Martin to begin his work.

CHAPTER XV.

A LIVELY SCRIMMAGE

"HARRY, I've been about fourteen miles out of my reckoning."

"How's that?" and Harry looked up, inquiringly.

"Well, you know I've figured and thought a good deal over that stuff you lost. It seemed to me I had it all figured out where it went to, except that I didn't know where to find it. I wove a beautiful chain of evidence in my mind; everything was smooth as goose-grease, and sure as taxes. I didn't say anything about it, for I couldn't prove a thing. Now, I'm glad I didn't, for I was way off," and Jack Dodd dropped into a chair, in a perplexed way.

"What in the world did you figure out? I couldn't think of anybody to suspect except tramps," returned Harry, in astonishment.

Jack looked at him a moment, and then his face wrinkled into a smile.

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"Do you know, I put this and that together and figured out that Jasper Hardy was at the bottom of it."

"Jasper Hardy? The idea! He wouldn't dare do such a thing," and Harry's eyes opened wide in amazement.

"Don't be too sure. You don't know him as well as I do. But in this case I find that I was wrong. I just learned the other day that he went west about the time you took the agency for the transfer. Went to Montana. So that lets him out," and Jack looked just a little bit sorry that his detective scent had gone astray, even if it had implicated an old schoolmate. We do so dislike to have our pet theories overturned. Most of us would sacrifice more than a schoolmate on the altar of our egotism.

"Well, I'm glad you were wrong. I'd hate to know that Jasper would do such a thing."

"Don't be too sure. He isn't any too good, to my way of thinking," retorted Jack.

"I knew he was shiftless and lazy, but plenty of people are afflicted that way, who would never dream of robbery."

"His morals are none too good, as we both know, and I just quietly figured out all by

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myself that he was mad at your getting this transfer business away from him, and took that method of wreaking vengeance on you, and downing you if possible. But I guess I wasn't cut out for a detective," and Jack laughed good-naturedly, as he arose and walked to the window.

"It's funny that you should think of him the first thing, and I never suspect him at all. But then, why should I? He never stood a ghost of a show to get the transfer agency. Mr. Cummings told me so."

"I don't suppose he did. But you couldn't make him believe that. He thought he had a dead sure cinch on it. He told that all over town."

"I know he did, but I didn't suppose he believed it, himself."

"Don't you think it. He is just thick-headed and bull-headed enough to believe he had this job hard and fast, if it hadn't been for you."

"Maybe he did, but it doesn't seem that he could have been so foolish. The company doesn't select its agents that way."

"I don't suppose they do, but Jasper didn't know anything about that. He probably figured

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that because a man got up a petition if he wanted to be postmaster, he did the same thing if he wanted an express agency."

"Well, I'm glad it wasn't he, anyhow," said Harry, with a sigh of relief.

"So am I, I suppose," said Jack, reluctantly, "but," he added, laughing, "you know a fellow hates to build up a nice little theory without a flaw in it, and then have it knocked into a cocked hat."

"I never knew much about him," Harry went on. "He chummed with a different set of boys, so I had few opportunities of finding out his weak points."

"Well, I found out a lot of them. He was mostly all weak points. He naturally hadn't any more morals than a coyote. That's why I mistrusted him the first thing. But it looks as if I'd have to work out a different theory."

"I guess in the end you'll find that it was tramps," remarked Harry.

"Maybe it was. There are plenty of them around to do it, although it's usually a little out of their line," replied Jack, shrewdly, as he slowly and thoughtfully meandered back to the

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baggage-room, while Harry mused and pondered upon their conversation.

In his youth and innocence, he was yet to learn what jealousy, hatred, and revenge would do when given free play in the mind.

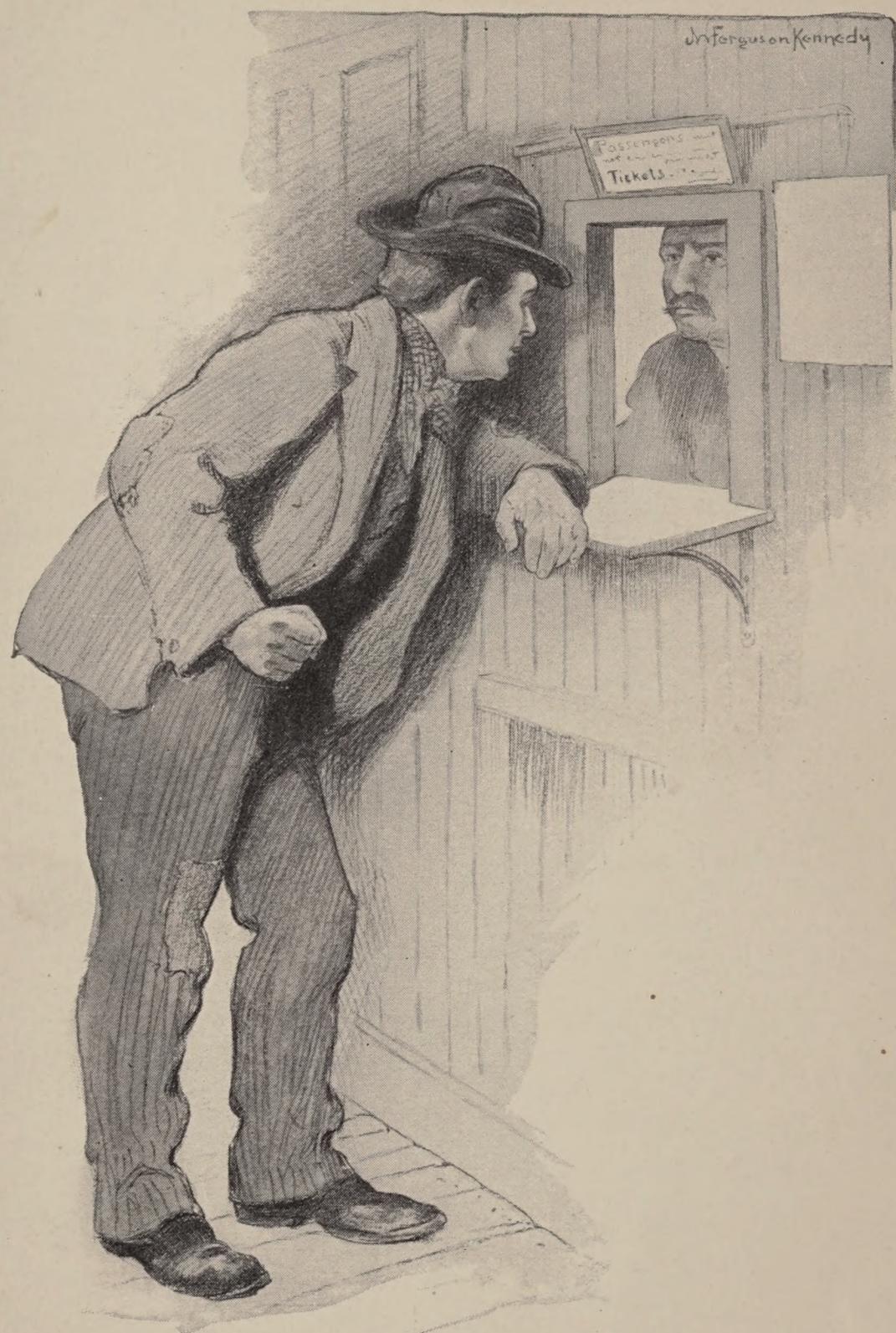
The following morning, a short, but vigorous, drama was enacted at the depot.

Just before Number 6 was due, a band of laborers that had been working on the "dump" filed into the men's waiting-room, adjoining the ticket-office, headed by their foreman. They were Italians, ignorant and low-browed, and could speak but little English. At present they were in an ugly mood, as their actions plainly showed, and the foreman had little control over them.

It seems that, their pay being due, they had left the grade where they were working, and gone to the nearest town to get it, as usual.

For some reason the pay-checks were not there, and they were notified to go to another town for them. Arriving there, they were again disappointed, and, piling on to an open flat car, the whole gang came into Bluffton, looking for money or trouble.

Their foreman, of course, was an American,



“‘WE WANTA OUR MON,’ HE SHOUTED.”

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and he quickly found out from Mr. Marsh, the agent, that the checks were not there. He told the waiting, sullen crowd the facts in the case, and said he would wire for instructions, but they were done with him, and insisted upon having their money right then and there. In their ignorance and blind childish rage the idea crept through their heads that they were being swindled out of a hard-earned month's pay by the cunning Americans, and they were furious.

After jabbering among themselves for a time, a burly, fierce-looking fellow took the leadership, and marched up to the ticket-office.

"We wanta our mon," he shouted, threateningly, thrusting his face through the ticket window.

"I haven't got your money, as I told your foreman," replied Mr. Marsh, firmly.

"We wanta our mon, I say, or we take it," and the fellow scowled and shook his head in a threatening way.

"I don't know anything about your money. Get out of this office, every one of you," retorted Mr. Marsh, who was a small, nervous, fidgety man.

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“Never, till we geta our mon,” and the big fellow reached through the window.

“Get out of here, I tell you,” and the agent picked up a small stove-poker, and gave the fellow a light tap on the nose.

Such a storm as that raised! The whole gang gathered around their leader, shaking their fists and vociferating in barbarous Italian.

A knife gleamed in the air, and affairs began to look squally.

“Boys, put these men out of the depot,” called Mr. Marsh, in a loud tone.

Never was more welcome news received. A score of railroad men stood around, watching the proceedings and “sizing up” the crowd of belligerent Italians.

“Come on, boys, and look out for knives!” called Barney Maguire, springing into the room and jerking a son of classic Italy headlong out of the door. A dozen men sprang after him, and for a few minutes the scene was a lively one.

Blows, cries, and the shuffling of feet filled the air, punctuated at frequent intervals by the form of an Italian, flying through the door and sprawling upon the platform.

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The sons of Italy were no match for the Americans in fist work. Evidently their means of defence and offence had been the dagger or club, instead of the fist.

It was every man for himself.

A beefy young fellow, Johnny Mitchen, with no knowledge of "the manly art," but eager to distinguish himself, struck a thick-set Italian twice squarely in the mouth, expecting to floor him. He never even dented the skin. In fact a fly might just as well have kicked the man. He merely looked surprised, and his eyes glowed with anger.

Jim Bartlett, a tall, lithe, cool-eyed brakeman, stood by with one elbow resting upon the ticket-window shelf. For some reason he was merely watching the fight without taking part in it.

He observed young Mitchen's futile attempt at downing his adversary, and laughed.

"Let me show you how to touch him up, Johnny."

There was the flash of an arm and the sound of a blow, and the man dropped to the floor.

"That's the way to do it."

Just as he spoke, a fierce-looking fellow, with a foreign curse, leaped at Barney Maguire's

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back, with uplifted dagger. In another instant it would have been buried to the hilt in the brave Irishman's neck.

Bartlett's eye caught the movement, and, with a quick bound, he was by his side. Before the murderous knife could descend, he dealt the man a blow in the temple that sent him crashing to the floor, and the dagger flew from his hand.

Barney partially turned his head from the man he was grappling with, and took in the situation at a glance.

"Thanks, Jim," and the next instant he threw his own antagonist out of the door.

Some of the Italians, however, surprised the boys.

A young fireman grabbed one of them by the shoulders and shoved him toward the door. The fellow turned, and, with an awkwardly delivered blow, felled the fireman to the floor, causing laughter and jeers from the latter's companions, who witnessed the unlooked-for feat.

The young man sprang up, dealt his adversary a blow that dazed him, and, catching him by the shoulders, hustled the pugilistic dago out on the platform.

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There was one exception to the crude awkwardness of the Italians in handling their fists, and that was their leader.

He was a powerful man, and had picked up a little science somewhere. When most of his companions had been hustled out on the platform, he was still in the room, swearing in barbarous Italian that he would stab the first man who offered to touch him.

Just then some one called out:

"Here's Tom Purdy! Tom, come and put this fellow out of the depot."

"What's the matter?" inquired Purdy.

Affairs were explained to him, and he walked fearlessly into the room. The big fellow stood scowling at the world, as Tom went up to him.

"Get out of here!"

For an answer, the Italian reached into his pocket with a growl. But Tom was too quick for him. One flash of his arm, and that terrible fist did its work. A crash and a groan, and the man lay motionless upon the floor.

Purdy stooped, and, taking a firm grip of his adversary, lifted him bodily and held him at arm's length above his head. Then, walking to

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the door, he tossed him at full length upon the platform. He turned quickly, just as four of the fellow's comrades, with drawn knives, sprang toward him. Maguire and Bartlett started toward them, although neither had a weapon.

It looked as if somebody would get hurt, but at that juncture a man in a blue uniform stepped into the room, and a revolver was levelled at the heads of the hostile Italians.

The ringing voice of Barney Horton, the day policeman, called, "Stop!" and the scrimmage ended right there.

No one had a more wholesome respect for official authority than those same Italians, and when they caught sight of a blue uniform, their knives disappeared as if by magic, and they quickly slunk out-of-doors and joined their companions.

"Where have you been all this time? You missed the fun," laughed Maguire.

"I was up at the other end of the yards until I heard of this row. Anybody hurt?"

"Nobody but dagos, I guess. One of them tried to stick a knife into me, but Bartlett objected, and persuaded him not to," replied Maguire, grimly.

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Meanwhile, the wires had been busy, and now Mr. Marsh came out of the office with a telegram.

“Load those fellows on a flat car, and take them back where they came from. Their checks are there waiting for them. Where is their foreman?”

“He is outside trying to get his flock together,” reported Horton, a few moments later.

“Did you tell him what I said?” asked Mr. Marsh, nervously.

“Yes. He will have them ready soon as the car is.”

“Thank heaven, we will be rid of them soon,” said Mr. Marsh, with a look of anxiety and relief.

“Poor critters! I suppose they’re not to blame for what they don’t know,” remarked Tom Purdy, with a half-pitying glance at the jabbering, gesticulating laborers outside.

“They’re a little too handy with a knife to suit me,” said Maguire, with a grimace and a shrug of the shoulder.

“They learned that over in Italy,” said Tom, with a laugh. “Knives take the place of fists over there, probably.”

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"They'll learn mighty quick that knives don't go in this country."

The nervous agent breathed much easier when the flat car, with its human load, pulled out of the yards.

Harry missed the whole row. He was busy in the office getting ready for Number 6. Haverly, who arose late, was at breakfast. Jackman, who came in during the night, was asleep, and Sam Andrews, always an early riser, had breakfasted and was taking a morning airing around town.

The first Harry knew of the trouble, Haverly came leisurely into the office as usual.

"Why aren't you over to the picnic?" he inquired.

"What picnic?" asked Harry, looking up from his work.

"They have been throwing a gang of Italians out of the depot. They got boisterous about something, and wanted to run things, I believe. I got there just in time to see that strong man of yours, Tom Purdy, pick a man up bodily and throw him outdoors. Say, but that fellow has muscle! I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it," said Haverly, admiringly.

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"I didn't know a thing about it. What was the trouble?"

"I don't know. Something about their pay. What have you got?" replied Haverly, unconcernedly. He had lived in Chicago too long to get excited over crowds or trouble.

"Not much, as usual."

"Who comes in?"

"Ben Brown."

"There's the whistle, now. Come on."

The long, low hiss of the air on Number 6 died away as Brown opened the side door of the express-car.

"Well, well! You're both alive, and haven't a scratch," he remarked, in mock surprise.

"What do we want to be dead or scratched for?" asked Phil, as he swung into the car.

"I heard you had a big fight on here," said Ben, as he began to unload.

"Oh, the boys threw a few dozen dagos out of the depot. That isn't worth mentioning," said Haverly, calmly, as he assisted in taking in the freight.

"I'll wager that both of you fellows were locked up in the bedroom," retorted Ben.

"We were both just itching to get right in

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the thick of the fight, but Harry was checking up and I was at breakfast," said Haverly, solemnly.

"More like, you were itching to get right in the thick of the bedclothes," said Ben, as he handed out Harry's run.

"Guess you never saw Harry or me in a row, did you?" remarked Phil, as he began to don his working clothes.

"No, and I never expect to," and Ben slid his safe out with the assistance of Harry.

"All right. Have it your own way, but I didn't eat more than half a breakfast, I was so anxious to get out. Just swallowed four eggs, two slices of ham, a couple of cups of coffee, and a few slices of bread," and Haverly arose, ready for his day's work.

"Lucky they don't have a row here every morning, or you'd break up the landlord," said Ben, as he started for the office.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOLD OUTRAGE

FORTUNATELY for Harry's peace of mind — and purse — the thefts of packages from the trucks during transfer ceased. His vigilance was unrelaxed, for he had learned a costly lesson, but, as the weeks passed and his freight continued to check up all right, he naturally forgot his troubles, and dismissed the matter from his mind with the thought that it was the work of some light-fingered thief tramping through the country.

After a month or more of immunity from loss, he mentioned the matter to Jack Dodd, when the latter dropped in for a chat one day.

"I guess it was tramps," said Jack. "I can't figure out anything else since my theory ran off the track. The hoboes are rounding up toward the cities now, to go into winter quarters, so you probably won't be bothered any more this fall, and maybe never. The ones that pinched

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your stuff may take some other route in the spring. That is, supposing the tramp theory is correct," Jack added, with a laugh.

"I think it is."

"It's a lucky thing for them that they let up," continued Jack, "or they would have been captured sure."

"How do you know? Who would have captured them?" Harry asked, with considerable astonishment.

"Oh, I'll tell you sometime, maybe," replied Dodd, evasively, and that was all the information Harry could get out of him.

With the cool fall weather came the butter and egg transfer from the north. Truck-loads of sixty-pound tubs of butter and stacks upon stacks of cases of eggs added to the young express agent's work, and made his job no sine-cure.

Many a night he lifted tubs of butter until his back ached and he could almost see stars, and when he had finally finished checking up ready for the morning trains, it required an effort of the will to drag home his tired frame.

Then he saw that the messengers had not overdrawn the picture of hard work. He was

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earning his money now, with a vengeance. However, the boys applied a soothing balm to his feelings by telling him that the butter and egg run would let up in two or three months.

"Brace up!" said George Parker one night, when Harry had an unusually heavy run of these commodities. "The cows will begin to dry up in December and the hens stop laying eggs; then you can have a rest and begin to fat up again."

"They can't let up any too soon," said Harry, with a heartfelt sigh. "Butter and eggs are nice things to eat, but when a fellow has to lift two or three tons of them every day, he feels as if he could get along without them. At least I do."

"Cheer up! It will be Christmas in a couple of months, and then you will get a taste of real life," said Parker, with a laugh.

"Is the transfer very heavy then?"

"Wait and see," replied Parker, laconically, with a shrug of the shoulder.

"I don't mind a heavy transfer of packages, but sixty-pound tubs of butter are wearing on a fellow's back. People don't send many of them for Christmas presents, do they?"

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“They send anything from a paper of pins to a cow. You will get every kind, size, and shape of package you could dream of in a year, and lots of things you wouldn’t dream of. Christmas catches more freak packages than the rest of the year.”

“Let them come. I can stand it if the rest of you can.”

“Yes, Christmas time is a snow-storm of packages, and almost makes a man wish he was a farmer or a bank president; but still, the relief a fellow feels on Christmas morning, when he doesn’t have a blessed thing in his car, is worth something,” mused Parker.

“I suppose the run is pretty light during holidays.”

“Yes; not much to do that week. A day or two before New Year’s a few belated presents get into the run, but it’s nothing compared to the Christmas rush,” Parker replied.

“Oh, well, we’ll live through it,” said Harry, cheerfully. “I’d about as soon be working as loafing, only I draw the line on sixty-pound tubs of butter,” he added, with a laugh.

“You’ll get used to it after awhile,” said Parker, as he prepared for bed.

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Harry went on with the transfer, uncomplainingly, although, when he caught a load of butter corded three tiers high on a platform truck, he did wish that farmers would turn their attention to other products besides butter.

Mr. Cummings, the route agent, came out during the butter and egg run, and, when he saw the work that Harry performed without a murmur of complaint, he could not help but admire the young fellow's tireless patience.

"You don't find your job much of a snap these days," he remarked, one night, after he had watched the transfer.

"No, sir, but the work has to be done," returned Harry, respectfully, as he wearily checked over his way-bills.

"That's the way I like to hear a boy talk," remarked his superior, with a pleased look. "Some lads of your age would be continually kicking and growling and sending in complaints to the general office."

"I never could discover the good in growling or complaining over something that must be done," returned Harry, as he deftly tipped up a tub of butter to get the address on the one beneath.

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"That is the right way to look at a disagreeable task, but lots of people don't see it that way. Do the messengers ever help you check these butter and egg runs?"

"Sometimes; but the incoming messenger is generally so tired these days that he tumbles right into bed, and the others have been asleep for hours. Andrews, who just came in, will go to bed soon as he gets his lunch."

"I know they must be tired. I've been there many a time. Hand me your way-bills, and I'll check while you call. It will seem like old times," said Mr. Cummings, kindly.

"Thank you," and Harry handed over the way-bills, and proceeded to call the freight while his superior checked it.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning when they had completed their task.

"There, that is more night work than I have done for years. Let's go to bed," remarked Mr. Cummings, with a yawn.

"Thanks to you, sir, for your kindness," said Harry, as he placed the way-bills in the transfer book. "I'll write them up in the morning. I'm too tired to think."

"All right. You have done enough for one

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session. Good night," and the kind-hearted route agent went to the depot hotel, while Harry wearily wended his way home.

He was asleep ere his head had fairly touched the pillow, and he never stirred until Phil had vigorously shaken him twice, and shouted "Breakfast!" in his ear.

"What ails those farmers, anyhow?" he drawled. "Can't they raise anything but butter? How many more tubs to come out?"

"Harry, wake up! It's breakfast-time," and Phil shook his big brother so thoroughly this time that the troubled dreams wafted hence, and he awoke.

"Hello, Phil! What do you want?" and Harry rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Want you to come to breakfast, of course. We are eating."

"What? Is it breakfast-time already? Seems to me I haven't been asleep five minutes," and Harry sprang out of bed and began to dress, yawning and gaping sleepily.

Ten minutes later he was seated at the breakfast-table with his mother and four animated, wriggling interrogation-points.

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"Oh, Harry! We have the loveliest pancakes," cried Mary.

"Good! Just my size. Lovely pancakes are the thing. Are they blonde or brunette?" he inquired, brightening up.

"Brunette, I guess. Have a hot one," replied Mary, passing the plate.

"This one is a little too much on the brunette order; it's burned a little," said Mrs. Baker, with a laugh.

"You were talking in your sleep when I shook you. You kept asking about tubs. What kind of tubs did you mean?" queried Phil, buttering a hot pancake.

"Wash-tubs, of course," volunteered Alice.
"What other kind of tubs are there?"

"Mrs. O'Malley, who washes for the Seymours, didn't get her tub by express, 'cause I saw her buy it at the grocery store," said Jimmy.

"Alice, Alice, don't take such large mouthfuls," said Mrs. Baker, reproachfully. "How many times have I told you to cut your cake in small pieces?"

"Like this?" queried Alice, demurely, cutting off a bit of cake the size of a squash seed and holding it up for inspection.

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“ Oh, a little larger than that; but don't fill your mouth so full. You can't chew it properly.

“ Here, Harry, are some hot ones. You get the top cake, for you work hard,” and Mary came in from the kitchen with a steaming plate of cakes.

“ Thank you, little sister,” and he gave her a loving pinch and took the proffered cake.

“ And I get the next one, 'cause I'm the littlest,” cried Alice, eagerly.

“ Wouldn't it look nicer and more ladylike for you to offer the next one to one of the others? ” said her mother, gently.

“ Then I wouldn't get so much to eat,” replied Alice, frankly.

Harry laughed.

“ There's honest childhood for you. No deceit there. She wants it because she wants it,” and he looked at his small sister with a twinkle in his eye.

“ You must learn to think of somebody else as well as yourself,” said Mrs. Baker, with kindly reproof.

Alice looked somewhat disconcerted.

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"I was hungry," she said at length, with a slightly shamefaced look.

"We are all hungry, but we mustn't be selfish about it," and Mrs. Baker took the plate and went after more cakes. In a few moments she returned, and fresh cakes were distributed.

"Harry, you look tired. Are you working harder than usual?" and she looked affectionately at her eldest son.

"Yes, the work has been much harder of late, but I hope it won't last long."

"What is the cause of it?"

"The butter and egg run is unusually heavy these days. Just half a swallow for a top dressing," and Harry passed his cup.

"Do butter and eggs run?" queried Alice.

"They seem to, and all run in this direction," he returned, gravely.

"How can they run without any legs?" asked Alice.

"I know. They run by express," put in Jimmy, eager to air his knowledge.

"Do butter and eggs come in wash-tubs?" queried Alice again, referring to the original subject.

"No, butter comes in small tubs, called but-

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ter-tubs, and eggs come in cases," replied Harry, kindly.

"Little tubs like we wash our doll clothes in?" she persisted.

"Oh, no! Hardly that small," he laughed. "They hold sixty or seventy pounds of butter, and are made for that purpose; but here comes Mary with more cakes. Now get down to business, and give mother the top one. Always remember to look out for her first."

But Mrs. Baker held up her hands.

"No more, thanks. I have plenty."

"About two more does me," said Harry, taking off the steaming cakes.

"I'm full," announced Jimmy, getting away from the table with more alacrity than grace.

"Me, too," and Phil placed his knife and fork parallel on his plate, and followed Jimmy's example.

"Mary, don't fry any more. They are all through, and Alice, I want you to run over before school and borrow Mrs. Burson's *Delineator*. I want to look at the cloak and jacket patterns. I've got to make you girls a cloak or jacket for winter. Here, Alice, you forgot to put your knife and fork where they belong."

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"I forgot," replied Alice, and she dutifully returned and placed her knife and fork side by side as Phil had done.

She lingered a moment, and finally said, hesitatingly:

"I tore my dress a little bit under the arm."

Mrs. Baker held up her hands in astonishment. "What? That new school dress?"

"Yes'm."

"How did you do it?"

"Playing crack-the-whip," confessed Alice, looking at Phil and Jimmy.

"Alice Baker, do you play crack-the-whip with a lot of rough boys?" and her mother tried to look severely reproving.

"Yes'm, sometimes," and Alice twisted about on one foot, while Phil and Jimmy tee-heed, softly.

"I'm astonished at you," and Mrs. Baker tried her best to keep a straight face, while Harry's eyes danced.

"I wouldn't have tore it, but they put us little ones down at the end of the line, where we get the hard knocks," said Alice, indignantly, with an accusing look at Phil, while Harry ha-ha-ed outright.

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"Well, don't play that any more. It's too rough for little girls."

"I won't let her do it again, mother," said Phil, repentantly, "but she wanted to get down at the end, so we let her."

"That's the way to talk, Phil. Good-by," said Harry, heartily, and he was gone.

He had just finished getting his morning run in shape when Mr. Cummings, who had risen late, came in from breakfast.

"Well, how do you feel this morning after your hard night's work?" he inquired.

"All right. Never felt better," was the cheery reply, as Harry pulled his truck out on the platform ready for the train.

"Young muscles don't stiffen up from night work like old ones. Twenty-five years ago it wouldn't have bothered me, but I couldn't stand it now. Who comes in this morning?"

"Thompson. And here comes Martin, to take the run out. A little late, Tom," as the belated messenger trotted around the corner of the hotel.

"Yes, so I see. Here's the train right on top of us. Got my run, Harry? All right. Much obliged," and Tom Martin threw his coat over

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his arm and walked along by the truck as Number 6 whistled.

A familiar hiss of air and the train rumbled by and came to a stop as Thompson opened the sliding side door of his car. The messenger safe and freight run were loaded in, and Harry stepped inside a moment as usual to see what was in the car.

"Hello, Gus. What sort of an animal have you in this box?"

"That's an Australian Two-Guesses-Coming," replied Thompson, indifferently, as he slid out his safe.

"It's homely enough to be anything. Looks like a cross between a wart-hog and the Democratic jackass," remarked Tom, giving Thompson a little rub on his politics as he hung up his coat, and proceeded to don his working clothes.

"Maybe it is. It's going to New York, where all the cranks live, except a few of the worst, that put up in Chicago," and Gus started for the office as Mr. Cummings called good-by to Harry, and the train rolled away.

That night Harry went to attend Number 3 as usual. On the night transfer he carried a canvas sack suspended around his neck, in which he



"HE . . . SAW A MAN SPRING UPON THE PLATFORM OF
THE NEAREST COACH."

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placed his money run. It was simply a precautionary measure, enabling him to keep the money immediately under his eye.

Olmstead was the messenger that night. When they had transferred the freight and Harry was ready to return to the office, Olmstead handed him his run, saying in a low tone:

"There's a five-thousand-dollar money package in with the rest. Don't let it get away from you."

"I'll try not to." And Harry placed the run in his sack and buckled the strap.

The platform was not very dark, and passengers and railway employees were passing and re-passing.

Harry was well away from the express-car when he suddenly felt a tug at his back; the strap around his neck was severed by a keen knife, and he felt the precious sack jerked away from him.

He wheeled instantly and saw a man spring upon the platform of the nearest coach.

In a flash Harry realized what had been done, and leaped after the fellow, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Thieves! Robbers! Help!"

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Then followed a scene of confusion. The passers nearest Harry knew that some outrage had been committed. They saw the two flying figures and instinctively joined in the chase, yelling, "Stop thief." The sound of hurrying feet came from all directions, as men came running up to learn the cause of the trouble.

Olmstead, from his car, heard the cry, and, looking out, saw Harry's truck-load of freight standing there and saw men springing upon the cars. Then the truth flashed upon him and he muttered:

"The boy's been robbed again, sure as shooting. I hope it isn't the money, but I can't leave this car to help him."

"Where is it? What is it? Who is it?" a dozen men cried in a breath.

"The express agent has been robbed. The thief ran out into the yards," somebody cried.

The crowd waited to hear no more, but swarmed across the coach platforms and out among the freight-cars, looking eagerly for somebody or something, they hardly knew what.

Harry was hard after the flying thief as the latter sprang across the coach and dashed down through the yards.

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Thoughts of his great loss lent wings to his feet, and he gained upon the fugitive. He had chased the latter a car-length, when he suddenly remembered his revolver. Drawing it, he tried to get a running aim, and fired just as the fellow dodged under a freight-car.

Harry unhesitatingly plunged after, but when he crawled out on the other side, the thief was nowhere in sight.

He yelled "Thieves" to attract attention, and a score of men appeared upon the scene.

"What is it?"

"A man cut the straps of my express-sack and ran off with it. He just dodged out from under this car. Scatter through the yards. He's probably hiding among the box cars," said Harry, breathlessly.

"Was there much in the sack?" some one asked, curiously.

"Yes, a lot of money," and at that magic word the crowd melted away and scattered through the yards, hoping to catch the thief and gain a reward from the express company.

Presently Number 3 pulled out, for passenger and mail trains cannot stop to catch thieves. Its departure allowed the depot lights to shine out

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in the yards, and men could be seen everywhere, peering under, around, and between freight-cars, looking for the vanished thief, but in vain. After half an hour's fruitless search, Harry remembered that he had left his truck-load of freight out upon the platform, entirely unguarded.

With a heavy heart he hastened back, but his truck was gone. He went to the office only to find everything dark and silent, and the door locked. Just then one of the night men passing by said:

"Your messengers took care of the freight. They took it in the office and then went out in the yards to help hunt for that fellow. Did you get any trace of him?"

"No," returned Harry, wearily, and crossed the tracks again to continue the search.

It was a hopeless task. Hundreds of freight-cars were scattered everywhere, making an ideal hiding-place for an expert thief.

Another hour's search, and Harry, together with Andrews, Brown, and Haverly, whom he had met in the yards, reluctantly returned to the office.

It seemed to Harry as if the joy had gone out of his life. He realized that it would take years

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of hard work to repay such an amount of money to the company, and the thoughts of it fairly made him sick for the moment. No wonder he stumbled along wearily without a word.

"Never mind, Harry. You'll come out of it all right. You're young, and it isn't like losing a leg or an arm," said Sam Andrews, kindly.

"No; I suppose I ought to be glad that it isn't any worse," he returned, in a tired way, as he unlocked the office door.

"Well, I'm tired," remarked Haverly, flinging himself into a chair as Harry turned up the lamps.

"So am I. But I wouldn't mind that if we had only found that rat of a thief," said Ben Brown, dropping into another chair.

"Neither would I."

Harry was too tired and discouraged to talk, but gave himself up to solid misery.

The messengers were sincerely sorry for his great misfortune, but there was little consolation to be offered.

"What's this, Harry? Has there been more stealing?" and Tom Purdy burst into the room.

"Yes, Tom, and it's a big steal this time,"

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replied the former, dully, as he motioned Tom to a chair.

“No time to sit down now. Have you been all over the yard and looked into every box car? The critter will probably jump a freight and get out of the yard to-night,” and the energetic conductor paced the room anxiously.

“Fifty men have been through the yards and looked everywhere, but not a trace of the fellow has been found.”

“It’s a shame the company doesn’t do something to stop this business. If I were agent here, I’d raise a howl that would stir them up up-stairs,” said Tom, wrathfully.

Ben Brown started to speak, but just then the door opened and two men came into the room.

“Hello, Dick. What have you got there?” called Purdy.

“Is this yours, Harry?” asked the man addressed as Dick, holding out a canvas sack.

Harry took one look and bounded to his feet. It was his stolen express sack. Another bound and he was by Dick Farley’s side and was clutching the sack.

“Is there anything in it?” he gasped, a wild hope lighting up his face.

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“Yes; a bundle of way-bills and money packages tied together. We haven’t examined it, but I knew right away that it belonged to the express company.”

Harry dove into the sack, and bringing out the package, untied it with feverish eagerness. A thick package caught his eye and he looked at it long enough to see the figures “\$5,000” upon one corner of the big envelope.

The revulsion of feeling from misery to joy was so sudden and great that he sank into a chair and stared about, mechanically clutching the money.

“Dick, how can I ever thank you?” and the young expressman’s eyes were swimming and his head dizzy with joy.

Every man was upon his feet and crowding around in wonder and amazement.

“You can give him half and then be ahead,” laughed Sam Andrews.

“He won’t give him one cent,” said Tom Purdy, energetically. “Dick Farley isn’t the man to take advantage of a fellow’s misfortune. Sit down and tell us how you got it,” and Tom motioned to a couple of chairs. The young brakeman dropped into a chair, and said:

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"We was getting ready to go out on 61. Jim and I was walking the length of the train to see that everything was all right, when we noticed a fellow trying to climb into an empty. We was on to him before he knew it. Jim grabbed him and the critter pulled a knife. But my pardner here is a scrapper, and he knocked him down before he could get action on himself.

"I saw him drop something when he went down, and picked up this sack. Before Jim could grab him, he dodged under a car and got away. I saw by the lantern that it was express stuff, and tumbled right away that we'd run into the fellow that everybody was hunting for. I knew it was no use trying to catch him, so we brought this plunder to the office. That's all there is to it. They're holding the train for us now. Glad to help you out of the scrape, Harry. I don't want any of the money, and I know my pardner doesn't," and the sturdy young brakeman arose to go.

"You boys have helped me out of a bad hole, and I'll try never to forget it," said Harry, gratefully, holding out his hand.

"Don't mention it," was the hearty response. There was a general hand-shake, and the two

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brakemen left the office to go out on their run.

“Boys, I can’t realize it all yet,” said Harry, with a pent-up sigh of relief.

“Check it over and see if everything is there,” suggested Purdy.

There were only a few money packages, and, upon checking, none were found missing.

“I guess George Parker is about right on your luck,” said Ben Brown, dryly. “That beats anything I ever heard of for pure luck.”

“Better to be born lucky than rich,” replied Andrews, with a yawn.

“Well, Harry, I’m mighty glad you got out of it so easy,” said Tom, heartily, holding out his hand.

“Thank you, Tom. I know you are,” returned the young man, gratefully, and the conductor was gone.

“Go to bed, boys, and I’ll check my freight run and then lie down on the cot till morning,” said Harry.

The freight run checked up all right, and Harry stretched out upon his cot, but not to sleep. He was too happy. He lived over the events of the night time and again. They

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seemed more like a troubled dream than an actual occurrence.

Presently, daylight came peeping in at the windows, and he arose and took a walk in the cool air before breakfast.

He held a reception all day in the office, receiving congratulations upon his luck and good fortune. But that night's experience taught him a lesson that he did not forget. Thereafter, when he had a money run of any consequence at night, he found somebody to walk by the truck and help guard it until it was locked in the safe.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD RELIC

As winter drew on the question of properly heating the office became another thorn in the young agent's side.

The stove sent out by the company was a sorry affair. It had been sent up from the St. Louis office, where it had been stored away and forgotten for many years, a relic of former times.

When Haverly's bedroom scheme cropped up, and the call went down to St. Louis for bedsteads, that old stove was resurrected and sent along to warm the office. It answered admirably in the summer, for they needed no fire, but when the cool weather came on, the agent and messengers found that a little artificial heat was necessary, so the old stove, which had been set one side, was put up and a fire built in it.

It was a seedy-looking affair, full of cracks

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and holes, and not much larger than a coal-scuttle.

Of course, during the mild fall weather it was only necessary to take the chill off the room, which it did all right, but as fall merged into winter, it failed to do its duty, and the messengers and agent went shivering around the room in disgust.

Express messengers, as a rule, are a very independent set of men, and the group that gathered around that little rusty old stove was no exception. Their remarks were freely given and very expressive.

They could not blame Mr. Cummings, the route agent; for, having been out and seen that it did not fill the bill, he tried to get them a bigger and better one, but in vain. The superintendent, Mr. Lambert, who watched over the affairs of the company very closely, thought they could get along with it, and so the matter stood.

Mr. Cummings came out again at the beginning of cold weather, and, during the evening, the messengers on the lay-over brought up again the subject of a new stove. George Parker said, looking at the old relic in a disgusted way:

AN OLD RELIC

“Have we got to put up with this thing all winter?”

“I’m afraid so,” returned the route agent, quietly.

“It’s a shame. We’ll freeze to death when cold weather comes. Sam Andrews says that stove was in use in one of the St. Louis offices twenty years before the battle of Bull Run. It’s just an old box of rust with a little iron ore in it. It won’t weigh twenty pounds,” and Parker’s disfavor increased as he talked.

“I know you need a bigger and better stove, and I’ve talked to Lambert about it, but he wants to make this one do if he possibly can. As an example of his way of figuring, the other day, when I brought up the need of a new stove, he said:

“‘Cumings, if you were placed in a cabin out on the prairie during a blizzard, with no heat but what you could get from that stove with plenty of coal, could you keep from freezing to death?’

“Of course I said: ‘I suppose I could.’

“Then said he, ‘We’ll make it do.’

“I saw it was no use to argue further, so dropped the matter. If you can figure out any

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way of getting him to change his mind, you are welcome to, for I know you need a bigger and better stove."

George Parker raised his finger impressively.

"Right there, Mr. Cummings, is where you made a grievous mistake."

"How is that?"

"You should have told him that you would surely wake up in the morning frozen to death. Tell him this stove is a half-brother to the 'cold safe.' Did you ever hear that safe story?"

The route agent shook his head.

"Well, I'll tell it to you, and you tell it to Lambert the first time you see him."

"Go ahead. But I won't make any rash promises," smiled Mr. Cummings.

PARKER'S SAFE STORY

"One time, a safe drummer on his rounds wandered into a new town, and, of course, soon had a merchant cornered, and was trying his best to sell him a safe.

"It so happened that the man needed a safe very badly, but he was a crank on the subject. A few years before he had been burned out, and when he opened the safe his books and

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papers were found charred to a crisp. Of course the books held his accounts, and the loss of them was a serious blow to him. The safe was supposed to be fire-proof, and the fact that it wasn't soured him so that he had refused to buy another up to this time. Safe men couldn't touch him.

"This drummer, however, told him such rosy stories about the beauties of his safe that he finally succeeded in getting the merchant interested once more in the matter.

"About that time, in comes another safe drummer with a different brand of goods. He got scent of the game mighty quick, and the balance of the day those two drummers didn't let that merchant have a moment's peace. They took turns boring away at him, showing the merits of their respective goods, and quoting special low prices.

"Finally, toward night he got tired of it, and called them both back to his desk.

" 'Now look here,' said he, 'there is no use of taking up any more of my time, or beating about the bush any longer. You fellows both know what I want. I want a safe that will protect books, papers, money, or, in fact, any

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inflammable thing from fire. A hot fire, too, mind you. One that will almost make the iron sizzle. I don't propose to buy any more ovens to put books in; might as well leave them on the shelf. As I told you both, I want the safe that will stand the most heat, and still keep cool inside. I don't care a cent for the burglar-proof part. If a burglar wants to get into a safe, he'll get in. I just want fire protection.

“ ‘Now my proposition is this:

“ ‘At the factory you evidently have some kind of a fire test, as to how much heat the safes will stand without scorching things inside. Am I right?’

“ Both drummers nodded eagerly, and began to get out their note-books to record a sale.

“ The merchant continued:

“ ‘Well and good, then. Now what I propose to do is this:

“ ‘Each of you give me your factory fire test, and I'll buy a safe of the man that has the best one. I don't want any more safes that won't stand heat. Isn't that fair to both of you?’

“ They both looked perfectly joyful, and said, in the same breath:

“ ‘That suits me.’

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“The merchant nodded to the second drummer, and said:

“‘Go ahead and give me your test.’

“He cleared his throat, and said:

“‘When you have heard our fire test, you must agree that it is absolutely perfect. The composition filling in our safe is only known to three men, and it is positively non-inflammable, as you will agree when you have heard our test. It is as follows:

“‘They take a common barnyard rooster and shut him in the safe, simply closing and locking the door as you would every night upon your books. No other precaution for his safety. Then a fire of white oak is built around the safe and kept roaring for twenty-four hours. Men are kept right there every minute, night and day, to see that the fire doesn’t cool. At the end of twenty-four hours the fire is cleared away, and when the safe has cooled down, the combination is worked and the door swung open. In every case that rooster is found perfectly cool and comfortable; flaps his wings and crows unconcernedly, walking out and scratching for worms in an offhand way, as if he had just got off the roost. That’s our test, and I’d like to

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hear it beaten to prove a cool safe in a hot atmosphere.'

"The merchant was highly pleased with the test, and said:

" 'That's the kind of a safe to have. I would have been several thousand dollars ahead, with one of that make, when I burned out. I guess you get this order all right, but we'll act fair with this other man and let him give his test.'

"The other fellow said:

" 'My dear sir, I really cannot permit you to throw your money away upon such a safe. It is second-class. His safe, I admit, does fairly well in a moderate fire; but bless you, where would it be in the fire test we give ours? Simply a melted scrap heap. We *test* our safes.

" 'Now listen, and I'll tell you what I saw with my own eyes a week ago to-day, just before leaving the factory on this trip. And I will say, furthermore, that every safe of our make is tested for fire the same way.'

" 'I was getting my sample-case ready for the trip when the manager came to me, and said:

" 'The workmen are just going to take the fire away from one of the safes we are testing

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and open up another that has just cooled down. Do you want to see it? You don't get to the factory very often."

"Of course I wanted to see it. I hadn't been to the factory for a year and a half. On the way, I asked him what fire test they used now. He said that for the last year or more they had put in a rooster and a pound of butter. These were subjected to an intense heat from anthracite coal for one solid week. "You will soon see the condition of the interior of the safe after all that heat," he said.

"When we arrived at the testing-room they had just pulled the coals away from one safe, and it stood there, a solid rose red from heat.

"Here is one they are just going to open. It was just as red as this one, a few hours ago," the manager said, pointing to the other side of the room. Just as we got there, the workman turned the combination and swung open the door. Sure as I stand here, that rooster was frozen stiff, and the man that opened the door had his eye knocked out by a frozen butter splinter." " "

A quiet laugh, and Mr. Cummings shook his head, and said:

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"It wouldn't do any good to tell Lambert that yarn. He would get around it some way."

"Did you find out before you left whether that frozen rooster man sold the safe or not?" asked Ben Brown.

"Tradition says that the merchant gave him an order for two safes and then fainted," and Parker's features twisted into an inscrutable knot.

"Probably fainted when he wondered how he was ever going to pay for them," mused Ben.

"Well, laying all jokes aside, I think Mr. Lambert is a little too stingy for any use," said George Parker, "and he was a messenger himself, once. I wonder if he thinks they are warmer-blooded than they used to be."

"Probably the stockholders are clamoring for more dividends, and he must cut down expenses," put in Ben.

"The stockholders are liable to have to pay for a job lot of frozen messengers, to say nothing of a fancy gilt-edged agent in the bloom of youth," and Parker twisted his face into another knot, as he nodded toward Harry.

"Oh, the agent won't freeze to death, although it probably won't be very hot in here," and Harry looked up from his work and laughed.

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"If Mr. Lambert could see the stove, I am satisfied he would send a better one," said Mr. Cummings, "for 'seeing is believing,' you know. But of course he won't make a special trip out here, and he doesn't seem to want to trust our judgment; so I don't see what we can do about it."

"What's the matter with sending the stove in to the general office, and let Lambert see it?" suggested George Parker.

"It would fall to pieces on the way, and he would claim that it never was a stove," said Ben.

"Then make a plaster cast of the little old barnacle, and send that in."

"Send in a photograph of it," suggested Harry.

But Parker withered him with a look. "Child, didn't you know you couldn't photograph cold? This old stove might take a good picture. You can't tell. I've seen the homeliest kind of people take as good a picture as I did," and a silence fell upon the little group.

"Let Parker go in and explain the beauties of this stove to Lambert," suggested Harley Burt.

"I'd lose too much time or I would. But pshaw! if a dozen messengers, with a lucky

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man for agent, can't figure out a decent stove before the blizzards come, they'd better quit," and the subject was dropped for the present.

As winter drew on the cold increased, and it was found impossible to keep the office comfortable with the wretched little apology for a stove. Mr. Lambert, the superintendent, however, would not consent to sending a better one.

His mistaken parsimony nettled the messengers, and they set their wits to work to see what could be done.

Tom Purdy had been given Al Manly's run, the latter going with the "Lake Shore," and Tom rarely failed to stop at the office a moment. The express office stove became a standing joke on the division, and the passenger men on every run dropped into the office to ridicule the old relic.

The weather grew colder and colder.

Every relay of messengers discussed the matter from every standpoint, but could arrive at no solution of the problem, and were compelled to shiver the time away as best they could.

Finally, Charlie Conroy, the passenger conductor, who had long since forgiven Gus Thompson the egg trick, dropped into the office one

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cold morning to loaf a few minutes, and incidentally relieve himself of his usual batch of fresh stories.

After listening to the complaints of the shivering messengers, he remarked, in an offhand way:

“Why, I can get you a new stove. Easiest thing in the world.”

“Do it, Charlie, and we’ll be your Uncle!” everybody cried.

“All right. Wait till I catch Glasser’s car.” Mr. Glasser, it will be remembered, was the railway division superintendent.

“What has Glasser got to do with it?” and everybody looked disappointed.

“I’ll show you,” and that was all they could get out of him.

One morning shortly after, Ben Brown came in on the run, and his face was a full moon.

“This is the morning we do business,” he chuckled. “This is Conroy’s train, and we have Glasser’s private car tacked on behind. Look out for company pretty quick!” and his eyes danced.

Paul Drake and Jackman were on the lay-over, and the former drawled out:

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"Let 'em come. But I didn't know that Glasser was bigger than our superintendent."

"You just lay low and watch Conroy. He has a scheme," returned Ben, as he and Harry hustled his safe off the trucks and checked his run.

A few moments later the jolly conductor, accompanied by his superintendent, Mr. Glasser, walked into the express office.

The former was brisk, bustling, and full of business; the latter, grave, thoughtful, and attentive, listening to the words of his subordinate in silence.

"Now this is the stove I spoke of, Mr. Glasser, and I really don't think the railroad company ought to allow it here; it isn't safe. The life of it is burned out. These boys tell me that it has been in use for twenty-five or thirty years down in the St. Louis offices. You can see where the fire comes out of these cracks. They're liable to have a conflagration here any time, and there is our depot and big eating-house right next door. I don't think we have any call to let the express company endanger our property. What do you think about it?"

Needless to say, Harry and the messengers,

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who saw Conroy's ruse to get them a stove, watched the superintendent's face anxiously. With him it was simply a matter of business whether the express company should be to the expense of a new stove or the railway company continue to carry the risk of a conflagration. He asked a question or two, and looked the office over carefully.

Conroy went on:

"You see that broken hinge; stove door just hanging. Some night after Baker has gone home and the messengers are all asleep here, that old broken door will fall down, coals pop out on the floor, and then a blaze. Then good-by to all our stuff around here. Everything's wood, and it'll burn like tinder."

Paul Drake, who was young and unsophisticated, here broke in:

"And it don't give out any more heat than a hod full of coals."

A friendly unnoticed kick choked off his remarks, and Frank Jackman pulled him into the back room, where he whispered in his ear:

"You shut up and let Conroy run this load of poles. Don't you see it isn't the frigidity of the

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old stove that Mr. Glasser cares about? It's the dangerousity of the thing that interests him."

"I see. There is also 'dangerosity' that he can't help us," whispered Drake, skeptically.

"I'm afraid so, but it's our only hope."

They returned to the other room just in time to hear Mr. Glasser say:

"I don't consider it safe," and without another word he walked briskly out of the office.

"That did a lot of good to bring him in here. He'll go to his car and forget all about it," said Jackman, reproachfully.

"Don't you think it," retorted Charlie Conroy, emphatically. "He's gone right straight to the telegraph-office to wire Lambert to send out a new stove."

"Maybe he has, but I have my doubts."

"If you don't have a new stove here before I come back on my run, I shall be greatly fooled," replied Conroy, as he went out.

In an hour Harry received the following message:

"Carry all packages and furniture out of building. Put fire out of stove and take it down. Will send new stove on 5. LAMBERT."

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Harry laughed, and read it aloud.

“What in the world could Glasser have said?” wondered Jackman.

“He evidently said something that woke up the camp, and we may thank Charlie Conroy for it,” remarked Ben Brown.

“That’s so. Charlie Conroy can have two chairs after this in this office. But I believe I’ll disobey Mr. Lambert’s orders and leave the things in the office,” and Harry smiled broadly, as he looked around.

“Yes, I think I should run the chances, seeing as it’s only a few hours till train-time, and daylight, with four men on watch,” returned Ben Brown, gravely.

“We’ll take the old stove down and be ready for the new one,” said Harry. And they did.

True to the promise of the telegram, a large new stove arrived on the afternoon train, and was welcomed with great rejoicing by everybody at the office. It was put up and a fire built in it at once, and the messengers’ troubles, so far as heat was concerned, were at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

By the time the new stove had warmed the office thoroughly the messengers and Harry were in the midst of the "Christmas rush." It was the latter's first experience of the kind, and he was forced to admit that the messengers had not colored the picture too highly.

As the day that heralded the visit of the jolly St. Nicholas drew near, the flow of packages increased steadily. Messengers started out on runs with cars piled to the ceiling, and many of them were compelled to take an assistant to call the freight, in order to get their work done on time and be able to discharge the packages at the proper stations.

Packages, packages everywhere, and nine-tenths of them Christmas presents. It seemed as if there must be at least one present for every man, woman, and child in the country.

Weary, overworked messengers, transfer men,

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and other employees toiled bravely on during the rush, joking and bantering their fellows, thinking hopefully of the blessed Christmas morn when the rush would be over.

Of course, in all this rush, bustle, and hurry, many packages were injured more or less in handling and transferring. It could not be otherwise. However, compared to the number carried, the cases of "bad order" were few. If a box or package were found to be leaking, showing that something had broken inside, the instructions were to open carefully, repack the best way possible, and send it on at once, the officials of the company having wisely decided that a Christmas box sent by loving hands should be hurried to its destination soon as possible, even if it had suffered a mishap and were not in the best of order. Claims for damages could come in later.

Orders were imperative not to hold any packages supposed to contain Christmas presents, but hurry them through to their destination.

Of course, Harry caught his quota of "bad order" parcels, and was at an endless amount of extra work and trouble to get them off his hands and started on the way again.

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One afternoon shortly before Christmas he was unloading Phil Haverly's run, when the latter said:

"Here's a box that's leaking. I expect we'll have to open and repack. It goes north to-night on the Dutchman. Smells good. You can see it dripping from this corner now."

"Yes, we had better open it," replied Harry. "Something has broken and may spoil everything in the box. Soon as we check your run we'll attend to it. Where is it going?"

"Way out in Montana. 'Fritz Schwanger,'" and Phil read the name upon the box.

"Irishman, evidently," winked Harry, as he lifted out the box.

"It's heavy, too," he added.

"Yes, it weighs forty-five pounds. Some Irishman from Berlin gets it."

"Too bad it's broken, but we'll fix it up the best we can," said Harry, as he lifted out Haverly's safe.

"See that he gives the Dutchman a square deal. Don't let him take part of the stuff for his kids," called Parker, who took the run west.

"No, I'll watch him," laughed Haverly, as they started for the office.

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When the other work was out of the way, Harry opened the box, and the messengers gathered around to assist, and incidentally make comments.

"That's kummel all right," said Sam Andrews, sniffing the odor of the escaping liquid.

"What's kummel?" asked Harry. "That's a new one on me."

"Oh, it's some kind of a German drink. Dilute alcohol, spiced and sweetened, near as I can find out," replied Andrews, as Harry lifted the cover of the box.

It was packed full to the lid, and in one corner reposed a brown gallon jug. This Andrews lifted out, and a thin aromatic liquid dripped upon the floor.

"There is your leak," and he pointed to a slight crack in the jug.

"Get some bottles from the eating-house and repack it in them."

"The bottom of the box is pretty well soaked. We'll have to take out everything," said Harry, ruefully surveying the moist condition of the contents.

"I'll go and get something to put Andrews's Dutch beverage in," volunteered Ben Brown.

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"Good boy. Make yourself useful as well as ornamental," said Harry, as he dove down into the box and brought up a pie, strong with the odor of the escaped liquor.

"That reminds me of old times," said Andrews, his eyes and mouth watering.

"How is that?" and Harry lifted out an odd-shaped cake, covered with white frosting.

"The boxes of dainties we used to get from home in war time. It makes my mouth water to think of it, and my eyes, too," he added. "Pshaw, I'm getting foolish in my old age," and the grizzled old veteran sprang up and walked to the window, where he stood gazing out upon the tracks, absently rubbing the moisture from his glasses.

"Here's a present for some little girl," said Harry, lifting out a home-made doll with beautifully embroidered clothes.

"Is it spoiled?" asked Andrews, suddenly turning from the window.

"No. Part of the dress is a little damp from that stuff. And here's a queer-looking cap."

"That's an old woman's nightcap," said Sam, with a laugh and a blush.

"Yes. Here's a bit of paper pinned to it:

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‘For Grandma,’” said Harry. “And here is where the little folks come in,” and he unearthed a Jack-in-the-box and a rattle. Then a pair of knee pants, a big wooden pipe, packages of candy, oranges and apples, and a book printed in German. A number of other things were taken out, nearly everything being damp or permeated with the odor of the contents of the jug.

“I declare, I feel as if I had been in somebody’s house and ransacked it while they were away from home,” said Harry, with a deprecating laugh.

“It does seem like sacrilege, but it’s the only thing to do under the circumstances. Everything would have been ruined. Now we can dry things out and send them along in pretty good shape.”

“The moral in this case is very plain,” observed Phil Haverly; “never put liquor in with your Christmas presents.”

“Not unless it’s in the form of a solid,” remarked Ben, who had found bottles and a funnel and was emptying the dripping contents of the jug into them.

In the warm office the contents of the box were dried and repacked, the cover securely

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nailed, and the box sent on its way that night. As nothing more was ever heard from it, it was presumed that the precious package reached its destination in time to be opened by a merry party on the glorious Christmas morn.

Occasionally a package, generally found to be a flimsy pasteboard box, would come to the transfer office, crushed and mutilated. It was straightened out the best way possible and hurried along.

Two days before Christmas, Tom Martin, on the afternoon local, brought in a parrot. The cage had originally been covered with paper, but the latter had become torn, so that the bird was plainly visible.

“ ‘Take it up tenderly, lift it with care,’ ” remarked Martin, gravely, as he handed out the bird. “It goes north to-night. The tag says, ‘Feed and water.’ I would also suggest that you don’t allow the boys to swear around the office, as it is consigned to ‘Miss Mehetabel Cannors, Northfield, Minn.’ Evidently a maiden lady.”

“A parrot! For the land’s sake! Can’t they talk enough up in Minnesota without importing parrots?” said Harry, as he gingerly took the cage.

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"It has been very quiet so far. The only thing it has said was 'Oh, pshaw!' once when the car gave a lurch."

Sam Andrews, George Parker, and Frank Jackman were in the office when Harry and Martin brought in the run.

"Hello. What's new?" cried Parker.

"Nothing but a parrot, and it doesn't look very new," replied Harry, as he set the cage upon the counter, and turned to assist Martin.

"Local or transfer?"

"Transfer, of course. We can talk enough here without buying parrots."

"Howdy do, Polly? Are you hungry?" and Parker peered into the cage. Polly, however, was not inclined to be familiar, and only glared at him in silence.

"Democrat or Republican?" teased Parker. Perfect silence from Polly.

"Oh, that parrot doesn't talk to every farmer that comes along," remarked Jackman. "It's probably seasick, anyhow, from its long ride."

All efforts to make the bird talk proved unavailing, and the messengers finally gave over teasing it.

Harry brought a few dainties from the eating-

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house, and the parrot devoured them greedily. Then it sat upon the perch and glared about in silence.

“It probably doesn’t say more than a half-dozen words, and has forgotten what little it does know,” remarked George Parker, in disgust at Polly’s unsociable attitude.

“It may have a larger vocabulary than you think, where it is acquainted,” Andrews observed.

For half an hour the bird sat there in silence, perfectly motionless. Then it suddenly roused up and began to hop about on the perch. Suddenly it squalled out:

“Hello, Sam, old boy. How do you stack up?”

If a bomb-shell had exploded without warning in the room, the surprise could not have been greater. Everybody stared. Then followed a shout of laughter, and George Parker said:

“Ha! An old friend of yours, Andrews.”

Sam Andrews gave a short laugh. “It looks that way, but I can’t recall its features.”

“Pull down your vest, Sam,” and the parrot hopped to and fro on its perch.

“Well, I’ll be —” then Andrews stopped and

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glared over his glasses at the offending bird, while the others almost collapsed with laughter.

"It evidently is on familiar terms with somebody by the name of Sam," said Harry, when he could get his voice.

"Probably one of Andrews's old friends down South during the war," said Parker, who was enjoying the joke hugely.

"Put me in my little bed," sang out a metallic voice.

"What do you think of its vocabulary now?" and Andrews quietly nudged Parker in the ribs.

"Sam's a fool. Ha, ha!" and the green head with its hooked beak perked sidewise, with one eye blinking at the audience.

"Seems to be pretty well informed," and a burst of laughter followed Parker's retort.

"Its vocabulary seems to be more remarkable for quantity than quality," said Tom Martin, who had drawn a chair to the window and was trying to make out his freight report.

"Father-r-r! Supper's ready. Hurry up, hurry up," and the green head bobbed up and down as the speaker walked to and fro.

"That's a nice bird to send an old maid for a Christmas present," said Jackman, critically.

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"Mary, where's the cat? Dear me!" clicked the feathered machine. Then silence for a moment.

"John'll catch it; John'll catch it. He's late," was the next announcement.

"We're evidently getting the home talk of some family," laughed Harry.

"Wonder if it's wound up like a clock? Harry must have worked the combination when he fed it," Tom remarked.

George Parker walked up to the cage.

"Polly talks too much."

"Oh, give us a rest," was the retort, and Parker turned away, shaking his sides.

"Say, Horton'll pull this place if you don't make less racket," and Jack Dodd stood in the doorway.

"Come in, Jack. We're having a free entertainment."

"What is it?" and Jack looked around inquiringly.

"Oh, some of the freak things that go by express. This parrot is giving us its family history; take a chair," responded Harry.

Jack seated himself, but from that instant the

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perverse bird shut up like a clam. Not another word could it be induced to utter.

"You're a parrot hoodoo," laughed Harry, after they had waited a long time for a renewal of the monologue.

"It's probably run down," suggested Jackman.

"When does it leave?" asked Andrews.

"Olmstead takes it north on Number 3."

"Better fit another paper over the cage and give it a chance to think up some more funny things to say. It's talked out."

Harry waited a while longer, but the parrot still remained silent, and he recovered the cage, taking pains to leave space for the circulation of air.

A few hours later it was again on its way, and that was the last they ever heard of it. They never knew whether the slangy, loud-talking bird was sent as a joke or a *bona fide* present.

Harry and all of the messengers breathed a sigh of relief when the Christmas rush of presents was finally over, and their work settled down to the ordinary level once more, although,

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to tell the truth, it was less wearing upon Harry than butter and egg experience.

January brought the whirling snow-storms and the bitter cold winds, but he bore them bravely, and patiently performed his duties. Several times messengers were snowed in along the line. Two or three times he was left with only one man on the lay-over, and once was left entirely alone. Every messenger was out on the road somewhere along the line, battling with the snow-drifts.

Harry expected to be obliged to lock his office and safe, and take out the run himself, but fortunately a train struggled through the drifts before the opposite train was due, and he doubled back the messenger. Transferring heavy truck-loads of freight in the middle of the night, with the thermometer hanging around twenty below zero, was far from holiday sport, as the writer discovered years ago.

Mr. Cummings came out twice during the worst of the snow and cold, and complimented Harry highly upon his pluck and persistence in braving the terrible weather.

One disagreeable incident occurred in the office during the winter. Frank Jackman had

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been transferred to another run temporarily, and his place was filled during his absence by a man named Dade Ashton. The latter party was from the southwest, and had been running into Kansas City. He made only two trips into Harry's office, but that was sufficient. In fact, one too many. He was dubbed a crank by the other messengers and none of them liked him.

They insisted that he was a little "cracked." And it must be admitted that he acted that way. One moment he was bland and genial as melted butter and sugar, the next he was a surly bear and wanted to fight his best friend at the slightest provocation.

For some reason he took a violent dislike to the young agent on his first run in, although Harry did nothing by word or act to incite his animosity. As the other messengers said, that was where the "crank" part came in.

Harry felt relieved when he went out on his run, and mentioned his queer actions to some of the messengers.

"Needs a good thrashing," growled Sam Andrews, who had little patience with that sort of people. "Why didn't they keep him in Kansas City, where he belongs? We don't want him."

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"I don't want to have any trouble with him, but he can't run this office," said Harry, firmly.

"Not while I'm around," and the veteran's eyes flashed in a belligerent way.

In a few days Ashton came in again, this time on the night run. That particular run was very tiresome, from the amount of work to be done, and the messengers were pretty well spent when arriving at the office.

The new man was unusually surly and cross that trip, and would barely give Harry a civil answer. Andrews was a light, restless sleeper, and frequently arose from his bed when Number 2 pulled in, dressed himself, and came out into the office for a chat with Harry and the incoming messenger. He was sitting by the stove, smoking, when they brought in the run that night.

Harry checked Ashton in, although the work was punctuated with frequent snarls and slighting remarks by the latter, causing Andrews to move uneasily in his chair.

"Where do you hang your clothes in this one-horse, country hole?" snapped Ashton.

Harry answered him civilly and went on with his work.

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But the new man seemed bent upon trouble with the young agent. He went on making slurring insinuations about the country office and agent, until even Harry's placid temper could stand his insulting remarks no longer.

He spoke up firmly and sharply:

"I'll thank you to keep your mouth shut about the agent, Mr. Ashton. And if you don't like this office, you can sleep in the hotel. It's right around the corner."

Evidently that was what the ill-natured messenger was waiting for.

"Tell me to get out of the company's office, will you? You little plough-jogger!" and with a frightful oath he sprang toward Harry with clenched, uplifted fist. But ere he could reach the unruffled young man, big Sam Andrews made one bound and was at the latter's side, his fierce gray eyes gleaming with the fire of battle.

"Touch a hair of that boy's head, and I'll break your neck," he growled.

Ashton turned, and in his blind rage, without pausing to think of the consequences, dashed his fist in Andrews's face. He probably regretted that hasty act to the end of his days. For the now thoroughly aroused messenger sprang upon

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him like a tiger, bore him to the floor, and his brawny fingers closed upon the prostrate man's throat, until the staring eyes and protruding tongue told him to desist. He relaxed his grip, and when Ashton could get his breath he began to beg and whine.

"I didn't mean anything," he whimpered, as he got upon his feet.

"You have a queer way of acting, for a man that doesn't mean anything. You may consider yourself suspended. Give me your safe key," said Harry, indignantly.

Sam Andrews stood like a gladiator with flashing eyes and heaving breast, fairly itching for Ashton to again begin hostilities, but the latter was thoroughly cowed by the big messenger's fierce onslaught. He advanced tremblingly to the counter and laid down his safe key.

"You had better sleep in the hotel, Mr. Ashton. It will be pleasanter for the boys," said Harry, quietly. "You can go back on any train you wish. I'll send another man on your run."

"He can't sleep with me," snorted Andrews, glaring at his late opponent.

But the latter had no wish for such an energetic bedfellow. He picked up his hand-valise

THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

and went out of the door without another word. He did not even remain all night at the hotel, but when Number 3 pulled in he boarded it for the west, and that was his last appearance at Harry's office; or any other, for that matter, for when the superintendent learned the facts, the irascible messenger was discharged from the service of the company.

It seemed to Harry that winter never would come to an end, it was so long and tedious. But in March he began to note evidences of a change. Gradually the winds and storms decreased in bitterness and severity. Softer breezes suggested spring, and Nature gave unmistakable signs of throwing off the frozen incubus. Intermittent rains took the place of snow, and soon that welcome harbinger of spring, the robin, ventured north. The foul, grimy snow was loaded upon flat cars and hauled away, and the big railroad yards cleaned up for spring.

Trains once more came and went on time, and the long hours of tedious waiting for belated trains was a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRAIN HOLD - UP

WHEN Harry received his March salary, he found that his surplus was sufficient to pay the mortgage, with accumulated interest, that had hung like a dark cloud over the little home.

He had taken forty dollars from his salary every month regularly, and placed it in the small home bank, with the avowed purpose to use it in paying the debt and nothing else. He knew that his mother worried continually over the matter, and was all the more anxious on her account to get the mortgage paid.

Of course, everybody knew that Mr. Baker had placed a mortgage upon his home, and all were united in the opinion that the place would go for the debt. They knew his income and peculiarities, and none believed that he would ever pay the incumbrance.

Great was Harry's joy to find when he made

A TRAIN HOLD - UP

his April deposit, that there was a little more than enough to pay the entire amount.

Upon his inquiry, Mr. Ridgley, the banker, informed him that the mortgage had been deposited with him and could be paid at any time.

In a short time the release had been made out, the money paid, and Harry was in possession of the cancelled document.

It is not necessary to say that he was happy. When he clutched the paper with shining eyes, Mr. Ridgley said:

“That shows what a young man can do by thrift and economy. You might have spent that money and never have known where it went. Little by little is what counts in this world. Save your money and keep down your wants, and you will come out all right. If more young fellows were like you, there would be more bank accounts.”

“I am going to keep on saving mine,” replied Harry, as he hurried away to tell his mother that the debt was paid.

“Hurrah, mother! Nothing on top of our house now,” and he rushed in, flourishing the paper with dancing eyes.

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“And so you have finally paid it? That’s good,” and Mrs. Baker looked the relief she felt.

“What was on top of our house? I didn’t see anything,” asked Jimmy, with wondering eyes.

“It was a bird,” volunteered Alice. “I saw it there this morning. Let’s go out and see if it’s gone, Jimmy,” and both children dashed out of the house.

“Yes, sir, it’s gone. Harry scared it away. I wonder what hurt it was doing there,” said Alice, as they returned to the house after making the investigation.

“Harry, what hurt was the bird doing there?”

“It was a bird of prey, sweetheart,” and he kissed her with a laugh.

“Alice, you’ve got your dress dirty already this morning. You and Jimmy must stop making mud pies. Now mind me.”

“Make us an apple turnover and we will,” and Alice looked cunningly at Jimmy.

“Apples are too costly; we can’t afford it.”

“I’ll buy a peck, and we’ll go on a spree to celebrate this,” and Harry vanished with a jolly laugh.

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"What ails Harry, mother, he acts so funny?" inquired Alice.

"Oh, nothing. Run and play now, but don't get into the mud. That dress must last you till Saturday," and the children went reluctantly out into the yard and began to gravely discuss their big brother's unusual actions.

Harry returned to work with a new zest. Joy has a pleasant effect upon everybody, and he whistled and sang at his work to an unusual degree.

"Celebrating the return of spring?" inquired Jack Dodd, stopping in front of the office with a couple of trunks.

"Yes, celebrating everything," and Harry straightened his trucks around, to have them ready for use.

"I don't blame you. This weather would make anybody whistle, after last winter," and Jack trundled his baggage along to the baggage-room.

"What are you feeling so overjoyed about?" asked Ben Brown, who was playing checkers with George Parker.

"Just paid off an old mortgage on the house,

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and it's like getting rid of the fleas," replied Harry, with an animated face.

"That's where the company's money goes, eh?" and Ben winked at Parker.

"Yes; he has a snap here. Hold on; jump there. No use to look; you can't get out of it," and Parker took two men and a king on the return move.

"You're a pretty mean man. I'm going to quit and stroll out to hear the blackbirds sing," said Ben, with a yawn.

"So you saved enough in the last year to pay off a mortgage, eh? Good boy! How much did you save, Parker?" and Brown turned to his colleague.

"I don't know. I give it all to the old lady every month, except ten dollars. Guess she's got a little laid away in her stocking."

"I haven't got any old lady, but I manage to put a few cents in the bank every month. Come on, Parker. Let's take a walk and hear the bullfrogs sing," and the pair strolled out in the balmy sunshine.

The April days flew swiftly by, and then came May, with its bursting flowers and wealth of verdure.

A TRAIN HOLD-UP

About this time, Harry was called into the city to meet Mr. Lambert by special appointment. It was the former's first introduction to his superintendent, and he was much gratified with the frank, fatherly manner in which he was treated.

Their business, so far as Mr. Lambert disclosed it, was simply a matter affecting the transfer, and was concluded in time for Harry to take the next train back home.

Two weeks later occurred an event that had a distinct bearing upon Harry's future career, and event that he never recalled in after-years without a shiver.

His favorite uncle, his father's brother, who had been ill for some time, took a sudden turn for the worse one evening, and sent for Harry.

He was greatly attached to his uncle, and felt that it was his duty to go. So, sending word home where he had gone, and leaving George Parker in charge of the office temporarily, he sprang into the buggy with the boy who had come for him and drove away.

His uncle was a farmer, and lived about three miles in the country. It was after eight o'clock

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when they arrived, and Harry hurried at once to the bedside.

His uncle had sunk into a sort of stupor, and Harry sat down to await developments and see if he would not arouse sufficiently to recognize him. Hour after hour went by, but there was no change.

About midnight the sick man awoke from his stupor and recognized Harry, together with others around. But it was the last flickering spark, and a few moments later he was dead.

About two o'clock Harry prepared to return home, as he wished to reach there in time to attend Number 3, the Chicago through passenger.

While he was waiting for the boy to get the team, a neighbor, who had been there during the night, touched him upon the arm.

"Harry, Joe Masters is out here and wants to see you."

A few moments later he was shaking hands with the farmer, and saying:

"I am told you wish to see me, Mr. Masters."

"Yes, and, according to this boy of mine, it's pretty important."

"Is that so? What is it, Albert?" and he

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looked down at a bashful-appearing lad of twelve.

"They're going to rob the train to-night."

"Rob the train? What train?" gasped Harry.

"I don't know," said the boy, simply.

"Here, tell me what you do know, quickly," and Harry's eyes snapped with excitement, as he looked at his watch.

"Guess I'd better tell you," said Mr. Masters; "the boy is rather bashful and slow talking."

"Yes, do," responded Harry, anxiously.

"Why, he was out in the pasture about dusk after the cows, and while he was going through a piece of woods, he heard voices. He stopped and listened, and pretty soon some men came along. They stopped when they wa'n't more'n ten feet from him, and he heard them tell about going to rob some train to-night. It seems they've been laying around the woods all day, waiting for it. After they'd talked a bit they went on by, and he come home half scart to death. In fact, he was scart so, he went to bed without saying anything about it, but he couldn't sleep, it bothered him so, and finally he come and woke me up and told me about it. I didn't

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know what to do to stop it, but while I was thinking the matter over, Gil Penroy knocked on the door to tell me that the old man was dead," and he nodded toward the death-chamber. "While he was talking he mentioned that you was here. I happened to think that you was express agent in town and might be able to do something to stop it, so I come over and brought the boy along."

"Did you hear them say anything about the spot they were going to stop the train?" asked Harry, anxiously, turning to the boy.

"They said something about 'Dead Man's Hollow.'"

"Just the place for such a deed. The train they are going to hold up is Number 3 from Chicago, and it's due along here in fifty-five minutes," and the young express agent closed his watch with a snap, and looked at the farmer with set jaws.

"What can we do?" asked the latter, helplessly.

"We can do something, or try. How far is it to Dead Man's Hollow?"

"'Bout a mile."

"And how far are we from the track?"

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"'Bout half a mile."

"I'm going to Dead Man's Hollow, if I have to go alone," and Harry's eyes snapped.

"You mustn't go alone. I'll go with you," said Mr. Masters, in alarm.

"All right. Who else can we get quick?"

"There's the Wilkins' right across the road, and the Belmonts and Fryers not more'n forty rod up the road."

"That's right on the way. We'll take the buggy they're hitching up to take me home with, rout out all the men we can, and try to get there in time to stop it. There's a shotgun and some shells here in the house. I'll get them for you. I have my revolver. It's pretty tough to leave a dead man and go to a train robbery, but we owe a duty to the living. Hurry over and arouse the Wilkins'."

It is astonishing the number of things that can be done in a short time with a quick, active mind directing affairs.

In thirty minutes after Harry had heard the boy's story, eight sturdy farmers, armed with guns, revolvers, and pitchforks, were rattling over the road toward the track.

The train was due in ten minutes when they

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reached the crossing. Harry sprang out of the vehicle, exclaiming:

"Let's hurry up the track. We may reach the place in time to spoil their game. The train may be a little late."

But when it is desirable that a train should be late, the perverse thing is nearly always slightly ahead of time. So it proved in the present instance. Number 3 came bowling along at a clipping gait, with a rumble and a roar that sounded unnaturally loud in the quiet, peaceful night.

The public little dream of the nervous strain that grips the engineer and fireman of a fast passenger-train, as the flying mass of wood and iron dashes along through the still watches of the night.

Yet the lives of scores of human beings depend entirely upon the vigilance and watchfulness of those two men. Keen, sharp eyes, trained for years in the freight service, constantly watch the track ahead, on the lookout for possible obstructions, washouts, wrecks, burned bridges, displaced rails, other trains, danger-signals, etc., while the headlight steadily

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bores an advancing tunnel of white light through the darkness.

All hail to the brave, hardy knights of the throttle!

The engineer and fireman that night were George Hastings and Ira Hutchins. They had just rounded the curve to "Dead Man's Hollow" when the former uttered an exclamation:

"Something's up!"

Hutchins, who had just opened the fire-box door to put in more coal, closed it and peered ahead.

He saw the familiar danger-signal, a red light swinging across the track, just as his chief shut off steam and turned on the air. The puffing monster's speed slackened as the brakes ground against the flying car-wheels, and in a short distance the train came to a standstill. The engineer smothered an oath, as he gritted out to his partner:

"It's a hold-up."

A masked man appeared at either side of the engine, and stepped up into the cab.

"Is she shut off all right?" the leader growled, holding a big revolver ready for business.

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"Yes," Hastings answered, shortly.

"Then come down here. I want you."

The engineer knew he was helpless, so he sprang to the ground, followed by the bandit.

"Go on back there and cut off the express-car. Hurry, now!" and the words were accompanied by an ominous click of the revolver.

The express-car was at the head of the train, and when they reached it they were joined by two other masked men. The side door opened slightly, and the messenger's head peered out in the darkness.

A flash, a report, and a bullet whizzed past his head and buried itself in the car. He hastily dodged back, and closed and fastened the door.

Sleepy passengers, dozing in the smoker, roused up, and two or three of them put their heads out of the window, trying to locate the cause of the stop. A gun cracked, a bullet whistled past the windows, and a voice called out:

"Keep your heads in there, and you won't get hurt!" Then the bandit fired two or three more shots.

No need for further warning. Every person

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in the car huddled down into the seat, and, with beating heart, awaited the outcome.

“Uncouple that car. Quick!” The leader’s voice was imperative.

Hastings did as he was bid, and stepped back.

“She’s cut off.”

“Come back to the engine!” came the short, sharp command.

A moment later five masked men and the engineer and fireman stood in the cab.

“Go ahead till I tell you to stop!” and the engine and express-car moved slowly ahead. A half-mile had been covered when the leader said:

“Stop her!” and the engine came to rest.

The leader motioned to one of the masked figures.

“Take these men up the track a piece out of the way, and watch them.” His command was promptly obeyed. The engineer and fireman were marched out of harm’s way, and the remaining four bandits surrounded the express-car. The leader pounded on the side door with the butt of his revolver.

“Open this door, quick.”

“Never! And I’ll shoot the first man that

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shows his head," came the defiant answer. It was Howard Gilmore's voice.

"Then we'll open for you," came the grim words.

A stick of dynamite was placed upon the car-sill. The robbers stepped back out of the way, and a moment later a terrific explosion tore the door and sill to fragments.

Soon as possible three of the robbers sprang into the car.

"Throw up your hands!" the leader called.

Gilmore, from behind some packages, replied with a shot from his revolver. The robbers sent a fusillade of bullets in the direction of the plucky messenger, and he returned the fire rapidly as possible, but from the uncertain light and the rapid shooting no one was hurt.

Then there was a momentary lull, and the leader called again:

"Throw up your hands, or we'll kill you."

Without replying, the messenger caught a quick aim at one of the robbers, and fired again. It was a fatal shot. The bullet struck the robber fairly in the head, and he dropped to the floor like a log. Then the leader caught a partial view of Gilmore's body and returned the fire.

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He saw the messenger throw up his hands and go down behind his barricade.

“Quick! See if he’s done for, and blow open the safe.”

That express run was one of the few that carried a large through safe. It was used where a large amount of money was to be sent to one destination.

The agent at the starting-point locked the money in the safe, and it was not opened until reaching its destination. The messenger on the train did not even know the combination. He simply had a way-bill for one locked safe. His duty was to guard it *en route*. The agent at the end of the run opened the safe and took charge of the money.

The robbers evidently knew that the train carried such a safe, for, when Gilmore fell, the leader motioned his pals toward him, while his own eyes roved eagerly around the car.

He soon spied the big through safe, and his eyes gleamed. Just then one of the robbers came back, and said:

“He got the package all right” (meaning that the messenger was dead).

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"Blow open this safe quick! We're losing time," came the sharp words.

A stick of dynamite was placed upon the safe, but before the fuse could be lighted, they heard the cry, "Surrender!" at the door.

Meanwhile, Harry and the farmers made all speed possible. But stumbling over railroad-ties in the night is not a very rapid means of travel, and they were yet some distance from "Dead Man's Hollow" when the whistle of the approaching train reached their ears.

As they hurried on still faster, the rumble of the approaching train eased down and then ceased. The engine had come to a standstill.

"Hark! I hear pistol-shots," said Masters, pausing to listen.

"So do I," said Jud Fryer. "I heard them just as plain as could be. There they go again," as several shots came distinctly through the still night air. Presently they heard the engine puffing again. It seemed to be moving toward them.

Then the glare of the headlight lighted up the hills, showing that the engine was coming around a curve into view.

The sound told Harry that the whole train

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was not moving, and he was greatly puzzled for a moment to account for the strange proceeding. Then it occurred to him that the robbers had cut off the express-car, and were taking it away from the train to rob it.

“Get back out of the light,” he whispered to his companions. “Don’t let them see us if they pass.” His orders were obeyed, and everybody crouched low and silently in the semi-darkness. The engine, with the express-car, puffed slowly by, and they could dimly see several men in the cab and knew that some of them were robbers, but dared not shoot for fear of hitting the engineer or fireman.

The engine stopped a short distance down the track, and presently Harry and the farmers could make out dark figures moving about the express-car. Then they heard a gruff voice say:

“Open this door, quick!”

Harry could not hear the answer, but he knew it was Gilmore’s run, and presumed that he was in the car. Then it occurred to him in a flash that those messengers carried a large through safe. The robbers knew it, and it was the contents of that safe they were after.

A moment later a sharp explosion broke upon

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the still air, and the car door was blown into a thousand fragments.

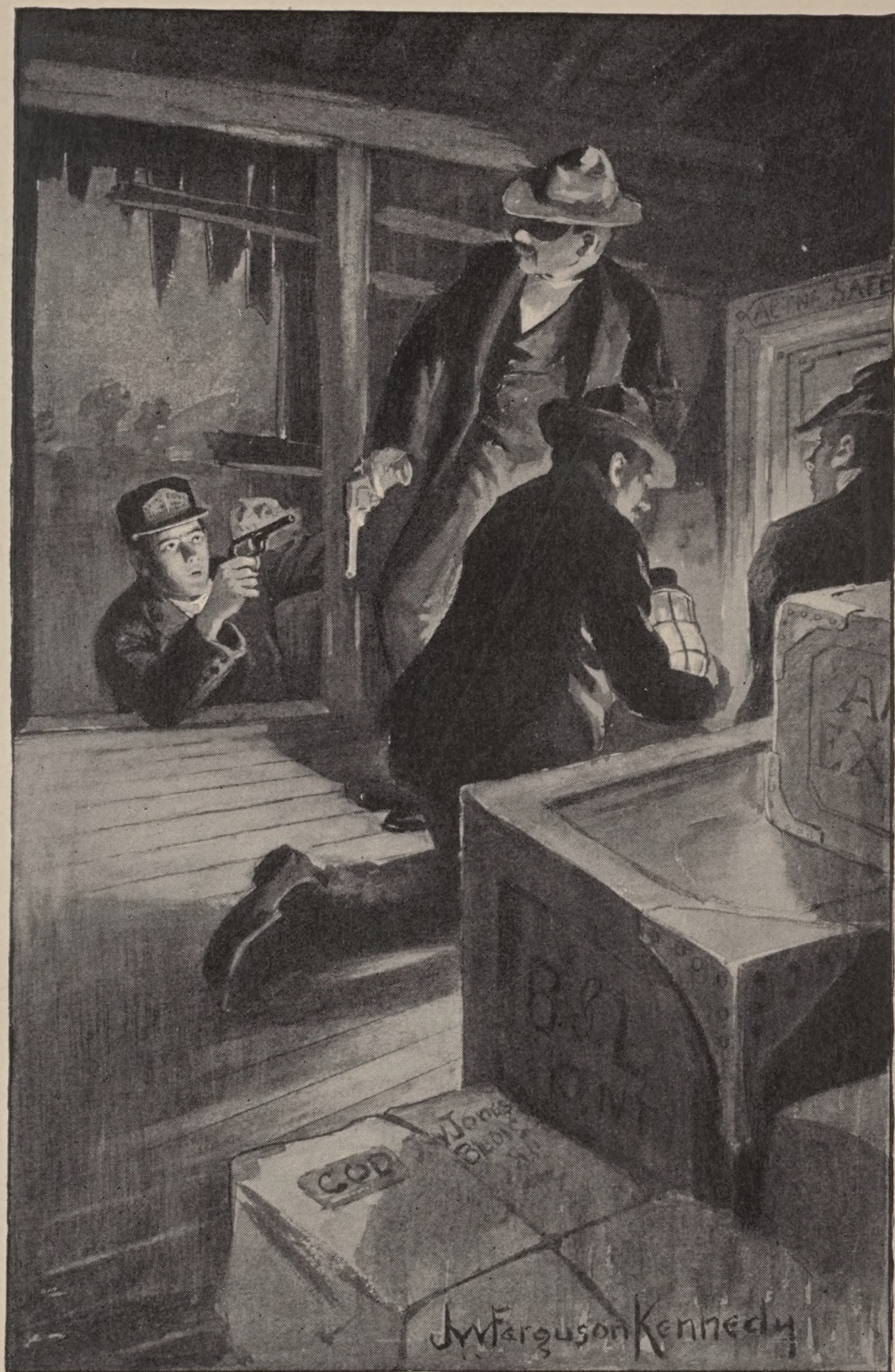
Harry dimly saw two or three forms spring into the car, and heard a fusillade of shots. Then all was quiet. "Come on, men! I'm afraid they've killed the messenger. Let's get there before they blow open the safe," and they hurried up to the scene of the robbery.

Harry had divided the men, and his squad was on the side of the wrecked door. The darkness favoring them, they reached the car without being seen.

Like wolves after their prey, the robbers were hot on the scent of money, and did not dream of an interruption. A masked man outside stood guard by the open door, or rather the hole in the side of the car. He was so intent upon the work of his confederates in the car that Harry and his party were upon him before he knew of their presence.

"Surrender!" called Harry.

The bandit turned with a curse, and discharged a revolver pointblank into their faces. Fortunately the darkness favored them, and no one was hit, and before he could shoot again,



“SURRENDER, OR WE’LL SHOOT!”

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the miscreant was knocked senseless by a musket in the hands of sturdy Jud Fryer.

While they were securing the rascal, his confederates, hearing the commotion, appeared at the door.

“Surrender, or we’ll shoot!” called Harry.

Taking in the situation at a glance, the robbers sprang across the car and leaped out of the opposite side door into the darkness.

Harry heard calls to surrender, then shots, followed by the sound of men running. He quickly ran around the car.

“Did you get any of them?”

“No, but one of them nearly got me,” replied John Belmont. “I got a bullet through my hat.”

“Thank Heaven, no one is hurt,” said Harry, with a feeling of intense relief.

“Hist! Here come two men,” as two dark forms appeared coming along the track.

“Halt!”

“Don’t shoot. We’re friends,” and a moment later Hastings and Hutchins appeared in their midst.

“Is that you, George and Ira?” asked Harry, peering into their faces.

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"Yes. The fellow that was guarding us heard the shooting and skipped. Is that you, Harry? What are you doing out here?" said Hastings.

"Haven't time to tell you now. Let's get into the car. I'm afraid Gilmore's done for. I don't hear anything in the car."

"I've got a lantern here, but I don't suppose we ought to light it if any of those rascals are hanging around," said Hastings.

"I don't think they will bother us. It will begin to break day in a few minutes, and they know the game is up. They're probably looking for a safe place to hide."

"The car light is going yet, anyhow," said the engineer, peering in cautiously.

"Let's go around to the other side. We captured one of the rascals, if the men haven't let him get away," said Harry, as they went around the end of the car.

"Have you got him yet, boys?"

"Yes. He's just beginning to show signs of coming to. That old musket of Jud's nearly fixed him for keeps," replied Masters.

"Anything to tie him with?" asked Harry.

"I've got ropes and string in the tool-box on the engine," said the engineer, starting after the

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desired articles. In five minutes the captured robber was securely tied hand and foot.

"Now, let's get into the car. I'm worried about Gilmore," said Harry, anxiously, and after a little cautious manœuvring, he stood in the car with the engineer and fireman.

The first object that caught their attention was the body of a man. It lay upon its side, and the face was covered by a mask.

"Gilmore accounted for one of them," said Hutchins, in a low voice.

At that instant a low moan came to their ears. Hastings looked at Harry.

"Somebody's hurt, and I'll wager it's Gilmore."

Harry nodded, and they went on through the car.

"Here he is, poor lad. I wonder how bad he is hurt," and the engineer tenderly lifted up the form of his comrade.

The messenger opened his eyes, and said in a weak voice:

"George, I'm shot."

"Look's like it, old man. Where is it?" asked Hastings, with rough kindness.

Gilmore put his hand on the upper part of his

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right breast near the shoulder. "In here somewhere. The pain and loss of blood caused me to faint."

"Thank goodness you are alive," cried Harry, fervently.

"Oh, I'm worth a dozen dead men," replied the messenger, trying to smile, but it was a ghastly effort.

"We must hurry and get him to a doctor soon as possible," said the engineer, straightening up.

"Yes. Get coupled up soon as possible," replied Harry. Then they both saw the stick of dynamite lying upon the through safe.

"Better take that thing out and bury it, Ira," and Hastings nodded toward the deadly explosive.

"There's a little pool of water right here by the track. I'll just drop it into that," replied Hutchins.

"All right, but handle it tenderly, and don't throw it."

"Don't worry about me throwing it," said Hutchins, picking up the infernal machine gingerly and tiptoeing out of the car.

"I'll go ahead and get the engine ready; and

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Harry, you make Gilmore as comfortable as possible," and Hastings hurriedly left the car.

"Hello, in there! What are you doing out in the country, Harry?" and a lantern was set in the car, and Tom Purdy's face appeared at the side door.

"Blest if I know, Tom. I've had a queer night of it. I had forgotten this was your train."

The conductor climbed into the car. "I see Gilmore got one of them."

"Yes, and they nearly got Howard. He is badly hurt. Come and see him."

"Well, well, Howard. You've had a pretty tough time of it. Sorry I wasn't here to help you. Where did they hit you?" and Purdy knelt down by the wounded man.

The messenger pointed to the wound. "It's pretty high up, so I guess it isn't dangerous, but I'm weak from loss of blood."

Before he had ceased speaking, the energetic conductor had cut the clothing away from the wound. "It has stopped bleeding, if the jar doesn't start it up again before we get to town. We'll fix you as comfortable a bed as we can,"

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and, with Harry's help, he arranged the packages into a fairly comfortable bed.

"There. Now we'll get to town and a doctor soon as possible," and he started out. "Harry, what are you going to do with this fellow?" and he pointed down at the dead robber.

"Take him with us, of course. I wonder what he looks like," and Harry stooped, and, turning the body over, removed the mask, while Tom held down his lantern. They recoiled in amazement, and the cry came from both:

"Jasper Hardy!"

"How is this? I thought he was out in Montana," and Purdy looked at Harry in perplexity, and then down at the pallid face.

"I thought so, too. I don't understand it. But it's Jasper, sure as the world," and Harry again scanned the bloodless features of his old schoolmate.

"Yes, it's him all right. Maybe it was a fake, his being out to Montana. I think I can guess his career for the last year or two," Purdy added, thoughtfully. "He was too lazy to work, and drifted in with a gang of loafers and thieves, and winds up with a gang of train-rob-

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bers. Too bad, but it's his own fault," and he turned and went out of the car.

Harry went to the door. "Bring that fellow in here, and come in yourselves. We'll be going in a minute."

The captured robber, who had recovered consciousness and was blinking sullenly at his captors, was lifted in, and the farmers scrambled in after him. In a few minutes Hastings backed up to the train, the couplings were made, and the train started on again.

It was broad daylight when the belated train pulled into the station. The first thing was to wire the Chicago office, and in a few minutes the railway and express officials knew of the affair, and were on their way to the scene in a special car, accompanied by detectives and reporters.

The news of the hold-up and Jasper Hardy's death flew like wild-fire, and in a short space of time half of the town was at the depot, asking all sorts of questions and trying to find out all about the attempted robbery.

At the earliest possible moment, Harry took Jack Dodd into the car to view the body of their old schoolmate. He fully expected to see Jack's

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eyes stick out with amazement, but the latter disappointed him.

“Don’t surprise me a bit. I’ll have a fellow here in a few days who will tell you all about him and where he has been the past year. He has been on Jasper’s trail ever since you lost those packages.”

It was Harry’s turn to be astonished.

“Who is it?” he asked, wonderingly.

“Oh, a tramp detective that I got acquainted with accidentally years ago. He knows all the tramps in the country. Tramps a good deal himself when he feels like it. He has tramped with Jasper here. I suspected Hardy all the time of robbing you, although I confess I was staggered for a minute, when I heard he had gone West. But I soon found out from this friend of mine that it was a fake yarn; that he hadn’t gone to Montana; was just tramping and stealing.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?” asked Harry, with a slightly offended air.

“I started to once or twice, but I was afraid of letting too many know it. I wanted to catch him right in the act. Don’t feel offended, Harry,

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it was all for your benefit," returned Dodd, kindly.

"I forgive you, Jack, and thank you. By the way, I wonder if Bill Ranting has been with him in these scrapes?"

"No. He and Ranting had a split-up over a year ago, and Bill went to Mexico. I don't know where he is now. He and Jasper never could get along. Too much alike, I guess."

Among others that viewed the body were Jim Travers and Tent Shafer. And the boys talked in a low, awed tone with Harry, as they recalled the waywardness of their old school-mate.

The wounded messenger was at once taken to the depot hotel and a physician summoned, who found that his wound was not dangerous, a fact which relieved Harry greatly.

In a few hours the special arrived with both Mr. Lambert and Mr. Cummings on board. Then Harry found out for the first time what he had saved the express company by his prompt action. The through safe held one hundred thousand dollars in cash, consigned to Western banks.

Needless to say, he was a hero in everybody's

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eyes. The farmers who had so bravely assisted him, to a man, gave him the credit of foiling the robbers. When Mr. Lambert heard the particulars, he shook Harry warmly by the hand and thanked him personally in behalf of the express company.

"You did a good night's work, my boy, and we will try and not forget it."

"I only did what I considered to be my duty," Harry replied, simply.

"Yes, and that is why I thank you. Many young men would not have considered it their duty to take so much interest in their employer's affairs, particularly where their lives were in danger. You have the right stuff in you."

"Howard Gilmore deserves as much or more credit than I do."

"Yes, I am proud of Gilmore, too. We will take care of him."

Mr. Cummings was no less pleased. Harry had been a sort of protégé of his from the first, and he was glad to find that the young man had not been found wanting when tried.

Reporters wandered about, asking all sorts of questions of everybody, and then sent column after column of lurid literature to the city papers,

A TRAIN HOLD - UP

each one coloring the account to suit himself, and none of them coming very near to the actual facts.

The remains of Jasper Hardy were taken charge of by his mortified, heart-broken parents. Many came to attend his funeral out of curiosity, but none from regard. Everybody felt that he had neglected his opportunities and paid the penalty. He was buried in the little cemetery at Bluffton, and lies there to this day.

It was many weeks before the brave messenger, Howard Gilmore, was able to take his run again; but he finally recovered and became strong and rugged as ever.

The captured robber was given the limit of the law for a term in the penitentiary. He refused to expose the rest of his pals, or say anything about the affair, and as they were never captured, nothing more was ever known of it.

CHAPTER XX.

A PROMOTION

HOWARD GILMORE'S run was taken temporarily by a young man named Neal Higgins, and after the usual nine days' talk and gossip, affairs settled down to the quiet old routine.

Needless to say, Mrs. Baker was a proud, happy mother. Her boy was a hero. Everybody said so, and his praises were on every tongue. The villagers dropped in every day to discuss the matter and talk over Harry's exploit, and Mrs. Baker was a delighted listener.

But there was another home in that little town where joy did not enter, where gloom and bitterness held sway, the home of Jasper Hardy. Mr. and Mrs. Hardy held themselves aloof from others for very shame, and went their way, downhearted and sad, a great contrast to the happiness and gratitude that reigned in the Baker family.

Happy are they who find joy in their children.

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A couple of weeks after the attempted train robbery, Harry received a letter bearing the stamp of the president of the express company. Wonderingly he opened it, and the first thing that caught his eye was a check for three thousand dollars. He could hardly believe his senses. When he could get his breath, he read the accompanying letter. It was in the president's own handwriting, and thanked him cordially for his prompt, brave action.

Two thousand dollars of the money was for Harry, and the remaining thousand was to be divided among the farmers who had so kindly assisted him in foiling the robbers that memorable night.

The president said that the directors of the company had authorized him to send this slight testimonial in recognition of a brave act. He further said that at any time he could be of service to Mr. Baker, to let him know.

Harry felt like shouting for joy. Not so much for the money, as to hear from the head of the company that his action had been fully appreciated. He found out afterwards that Howard Gilmore also received a check for two thousand dollars, together with his expenses while recov-

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ering from the wound. In addition, he was kept under full pay during that time.

George Parker, Ben Brown, and Sam Andrews were in the office when Harry came in from the mail.

“Read that, George, and see if you don’t call it pretty tough luck.”

“What are you having bad luck about now?” asked Ben, as Parker opened the letter. The train robbery affair had passed out of their minds. Messengers get so used to handling money and living in an atmosphere of money, that a robbery or the loss of a package excites little comment among them. The fact of handling so much of it does not make them less careful or honest; just seems to dull the senses when thinking of money.

“What is it all about?” asked Sam Andrews, who saw by the expression on George Parker’s face that something unusual had stirred him.

“Oh, nothing. Just a little check for three thousand dollars, and a personal letter of thanks from the president of the company, for scaring away those train robbers,” and Parker read the letter.

“Well, well! Good for Harry. Allow me,”

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and big Sam drew himself to his full height, and made a profound military salute to the happy young agent.

Ben Brown shook him heartily by the hand. "Glad of it, Harry. It isn't any more than you deserve, either." Then he turned to Parker.

"Why don't you slobber over him a little and be sociable? You didn't have to donate any of the money."

"I'm going to, just as soon as I can get my wits together. It's his luck that beats me. I told him, the first time I ever saw him, that he would be president of the company inside of ten years. But I see now that it won't be more than five, with his luck."

"No luck about it. Just sand and hustle," put in Sam Andrews.

"Oh, fiddlesticks. The hustle part is all right, and a good thing, but if it hadn't been for his luck, he wouldn't have been out in the country at just the right time," persisted Parker.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,"

quoted Ben.

"And you needn't worry but what he'll have

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plenty of 'tides' and 'floods.' He is the luckiest boy that ever checked a way-bill."

"Don't forget to give the old farmers their share," winked Ben Brown.

"No. I won't forget," laughed Harry, as he locked the precious papers in the safe.

The following day, Jack Dodd came into the office with a man whom he introduced as Mr. Hayworth.

"This is the party that I told you had 'cultivated' Jasper Hardy's acquaintance."

"Ah, so this is the gentleman. Glad to meet you, Mr. Hayworth. Have a chair."

When they were seated, Harry said:

"I understand from Jack that it was Jasper who stole those packages from my trucks some time ago."

Mr. Hayworth nodded.

"Yes. He told me all about it once when I was tramping with him. He said he was going to drive you out of here; that you had got this job away from him, and he was going to get even with you."

"Jack knows how much truth there was in that statement. He never had a show for the place."

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"I soon sized him up. He stole those packages from you, supposing in his ignorance that the company would think you took them, and discharge you. He had quite a gift of gab, but very few brains."

"Was he concerned in that affair when they snatched my express sack with the five-thousand-dollar package?" asked Harry.

"Yes, although he didn't do it personally. He made one of his pals believe it was easy to get money that way, and put him up to snatching your sack. They didn't know how much was in it; just took chances on the amount."

"Another thing I don't understand is, why hasn't he been recognized around the yards? He was born and raised here, and everybody knows him."

Mr. Hayworth smiled.

"That was easy. He had all sorts of disguises. He may have been right at your own door for a handout. Probably you saw him repeatedly with other tramps, and didn't know him. A disguise changes a man wonderfully. I know, for I have occasion to use them frequently," and he laughed quietly.

"I suppose so. Then he was supposed to be

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out in Montana, too, so a person wouldn't be looking for him."

"He never was in Montana. He just had that report circulated to give himself a freer rein to tramp and steal around here. I figured on getting him red-handed this season, but some genuine crooks got hold of him and got him into that train robbery deal. He was just about foolish enough for those fellows to use. You notice they had him in ahead where the shooting was likely to be."

"Bright youth, wasn't he?" remarked Jack Dodd, as he walked to the window.

"Well, Mr. Baker, I am glad to have met you and set you right upon these points," and the tramp detective arose and held out his hand.

"And I am very glad to find them out, thank you. It would always have been a mystery to me," returned Harry, warmly.

"I feel sorry for his father and mother, but I guess it is all for the best that he is dead; for he would always have been a criminal. Good-by, Mr. Baker," and the tramp detective was gone.

Harry mused long and deeply upon the tragic end of his old schoolmate. He had always considered Jasper more weak and lazy than vicious,

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although Jack Dodd claimed that he was naturally bad. Harry, however, firmly believed that early evil associations had something to do with his badness, and he felt thankful that he himself had kept out of such company.

During the summer Harry received another surprise.

Mr. Cummings was out one day to check up the office as usual. He found everything in first-class shape, and when he had completed his task, he said suddenly to the young agent:

“How would you like to be Mr. Lambert’s private secretary?”

“Me? The idea! Why, I never dreamed of such a thing,” said Harry, in astonishment.

“Do you remember what I told you when we put the division here? The men up-stairs have their eyes on everybody. Lambert has taken a fancy to you. His secretary has been appointed superintendent of a Western division, and he must get another. He has had his eye on you for some time. He told me to talk with you on this trip. Better take it. While your salary will not be much more than it is now, you will be in touch with the ruling power, and stand a better show for further promotion.”

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"Of course I'll take it, and glad of the chance, if I can do the work to suit him," returned Harry, heartily.

"Oh, you will soon get used to the work. That needn't worry you."

"I forgot. I must talk with mother before I know for sure," said Harry, suddenly.

"That's right. Always think of your mother," smiled Mr. Cummings, "but I guess she will hardly object if it is going to benefit you."

At the supper-table that evening, Harry astonished his mother by saying:

"Do you want to move away from here, mother?"

"Move away from here? Where to?" said Mrs. Baker, with a puzzled look.

"To Chicago. Mr. Lambert wants me for his private secretary."

"Harry Baker! It can't be possible!" and her eyes shone with motherly pride and gratification.

"That is on the slate now. Think you can stand it in Chicago?"

"Of course. I can stand it anywhere, if it is for your good," and a proud, happy look came into her eyes.

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"We'll take these children into the city and lose them," and he looked around upon the four eager, inquiring faces.

"You can't lose me. I'll stick tight to mother," and Alice looked appealingly at Mrs. Baker.

"I ain't afraid. I'll go to running messenger in a little while," said Phil, with an air of importance.

"I'm going to teach school just as soon as I am old enough," announced Mary.

"I don't know what I'll do yet. I'd start a drug store if I only knew the price of medicine," said Jimmy, with a thoughtful air.

"Well, if you all think you can stand it in the city, I will accept Mr. Lambert's offer," said Harry.

"How did he happen to pick you, I wonder?" said Mrs. Baker, with a fond, proud look at her tall son.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Took a fancy to me, I suppose," replied Harry, as he arose from the table.

"When are we going?" asked Phil.

"Don't know. Tell you later," and he was away to the office.

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Shortly afterward, Harry went to the city, and had an interview with his superintendent. There everything was arranged, another man appointed to take his agency, and he returned home to prepare for his departure.

He had said nothing to the messengers about the proposed change, but now he told them, waiting until George Parker was in the office.

But for once Parker refused to be surprised. He simply shook his head. "You know what I told you over a year ago. And it's turkeys to tom-cats that you get there."

The news of Harry's promotion was all over the yards in a short time, and his friends flocked in the office to offer their congratulations.

Jack Dodd was one of the first.

"What is this I hear, Harry? Are you going to leave us?"

"It looks that way, Jack."

"He is going in where he can give the superintendent pointers on our weak spots. He will probably have us all fired in a month," said Parker, gravely.

"But what are we going to do here without you?" said Jack, with a forlorn look.

"Oh, you fellows will probably forget all

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about me in a little while," replied Harry, with a laugh.

"I'm afraid not," returned Jack, shaking his head, "but I'm glad to see you going higher, anyhow."

Harry did not forget his old friend, but in after-years, through his influence with the railway company, secured for the honest, faithful fellow a much better position.

Tom Purdy, on his first run out, dropped into the office.

"I hear you are going to leave the boys, Harry."

"Yes. I am going to try the city, and see what I am good for. I'll see you in there occasionally."

"Sure thing. I'll drop around and see how you come on," returned Purdy, as he went out.

Larry McCue, the section boss, Dugan, Horton, Briggs, and the rest of the boys, dropped in for a hand-shake and a hearty wish for his prosperity. His old schoolmates, Jim Travers, Tent Shafer, and the rest of them, came to bid him good-by also, showing that he held a warm place in their hearts.

Harry really regretted to leave so many kind

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friends, but "time and tide wait for no man," and the best of friends must part.

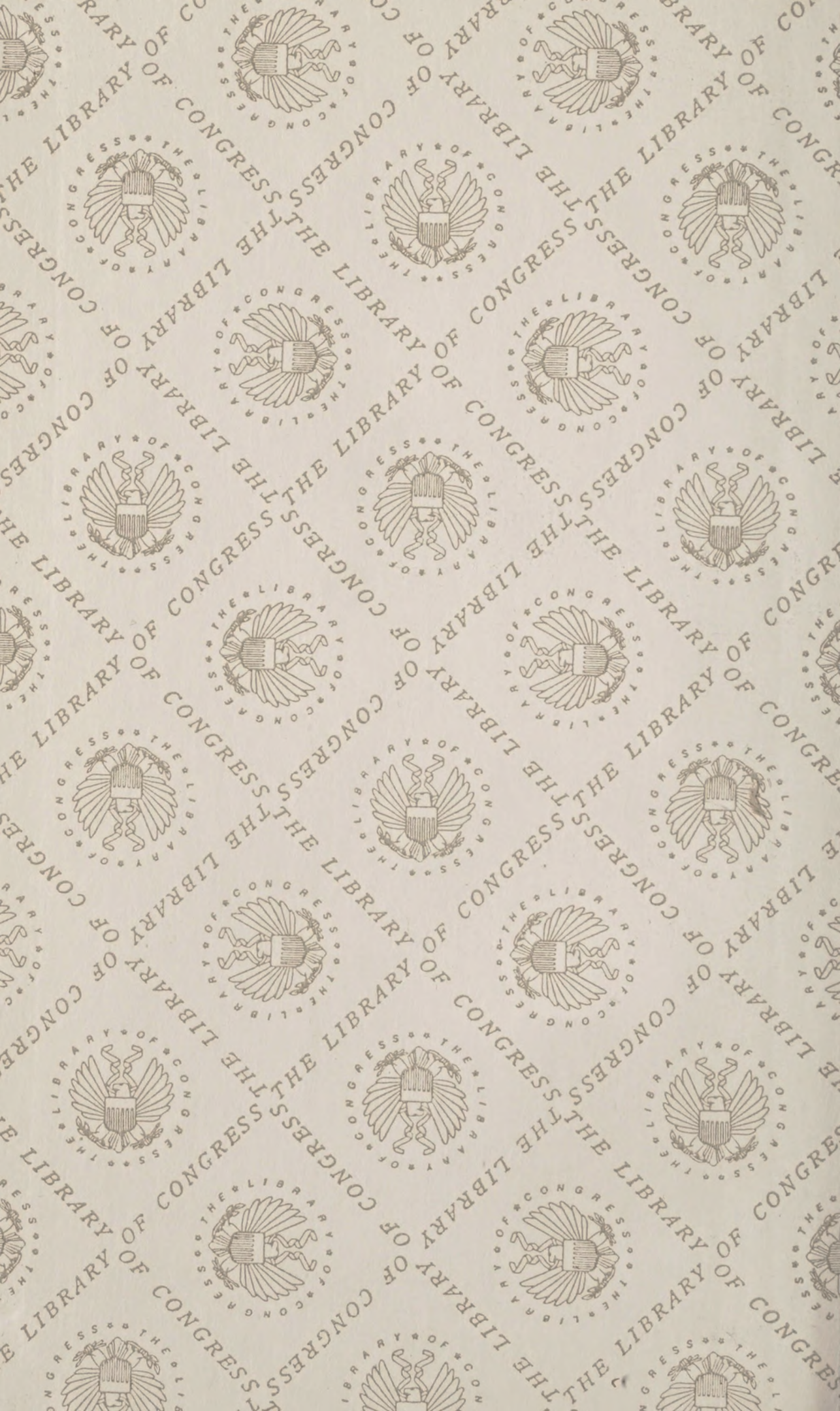
George Parker's prophecy proved partially true at least, for to-day Harry Baker is superintendent of an express division. Whether he ever reaches the top of the ladder, we cannot say.

Phil is agent in one of the large cities, and Jimmy is running messenger. Mary and Alice are both happily married, as are Harry and Phil. But Jimmy is an old "bach," and declares his intention of remaining so. Mrs. Baker is a silver-haired, sweet-faced old lady, and still adored by her children — and grandchildren.

Tom Purdy is assistant superintendent of a railway division, and is just as active and energetic as in the days when he made life a burden for "bad men" and tramps.

He and Harry Baker meet frequently, and live over the old days, either in Tom's private car, or Harry's private office.

THE END.





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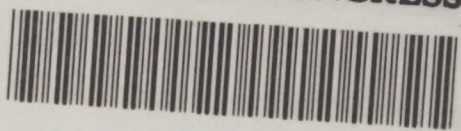
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